

## JOINT STATEMENT ON GENDER INCLUSION IN THE UKRAINE CRISIS RESPONSE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS

March 2024

More than two years on from the escalation of the war in Ukraine, women and girls' humanitarian needs remain unmet. The gendered impacts of the war are being overlooked, pre-existing gender-based inequalities are being exacerbated and Women's Rights and Women-Led Organisations (WROs/WLOs) are being largely excluded from the humanitarian coordination, decision making and funding systems in Ukraine.

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024, at least 2.5 million people are estimated to require prevention, mitigation and response support over the course of the year.<sup>i</sup> However, in 2023, only 33% of the Gender based Violence (GBV) response was funded.<sup>ii</sup> There is also a recognition that the ongoing war has heightened risks of various forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence, conflict-related sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, violence and abuse based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation purposes.<sup>iii</sup> In a recent survey conducted with WROs in Ukraine and the region, while two thirds recognised improvement in accessibility of case management and psychosocial support for GBV survivors, but the same percent of respondents raised concerns of a critical shortfall in GBV specific healthcare services for displaced women and girls.<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, women are more likely than men to face unemployment, and as a result are more affected by the nationwide rise in poverty since the escalation of the war.

WROs/WLOs provide vital assistance to people affected by the escalation of war, and do crucial work ensuring the needs and interests of women, people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and other marginalized groups are recognized and met. Yet they continue to report not receiving adequate recognition or support for their vital role in the ongoing humanitarian response and in recovery and reconstruction efforts.<sup>v</sup> In light of this, **all actors involved in the Ukraine crisis response, including donors and the international community, need to immediately prioritise support for WROs/WLOs responding to the gendered impacts of the crisis** in order not to fall further behind on international commitments to localization and gender inclusion in humanitarian action.<sup>vi</sup> Outlined below are a number of key priorities for international actors to immediately act upon as we enter the third year of the major humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

**Support, enable and champion women's safe and meaningful participation and leadership, including young women's leadership, in all aspects of humanitarian coordination and decision to ensure the needs of women, girls and gender minorities are recognised and reflected across the humanitarian response.**

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Despite the significant roles played by WROs/WLOs in the response itself, the humanitarian system continuously fails to meaningfully include them in relevant coordination and decision making spaces<sup>vii</sup>. Women are alarmingly also being excluded from discussions relating to Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery.

**Those convening spaces for dialogue and humanitarian decision making on the Ukraine crisis response, including donors and the UN, should ensure all spaces include a diverse range of perspectives from across Ukraine who are able and supported to meaningfully participate.** Organisers and power holders should avoid solely relying on individuals and organizations with existing access through either physical proximity or certain power and privileges.

**Address the need for core, accessible, flexible and sufficient funding for WROs and WLOs to allow them to provide the services and support needed by women and girls in the community**

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WROs/WLOs do not have access to the resources to provide adequate support and care for their staff and volunteers, many of whom are themselves internally displaced and often faced with increased personal workload such as unpaid care and domestic work. Limited access to core and flexible funding is causing a crisis for many WROs/WLOs. Without it, agile responses to quickly changing needs as well as long term planning for beyond immediate humanitarian support for communities is near impossible.

Additionally, two years on from the escalation of war in Ukraine and with needs in communities remaining high, many organizations continue to raise the alarm about issues of burnout, psychological exhaustion, and lack of rest. WROs/WLOs may find themselves unable to continue to provide support and services – this risks a further backsliding of support for women and girls.

**UN agencies, donors, and INGOs should critically interrogate their funding criteria to identify and remove barriers for WROs/WLOs and then modify their policies to better meet WROs/WLOs where they are.** This *includes*:

- Donors and UN agencies should revise eligibility criteria and minimum fund thresholds; enable adapted due diligence thresholds to the size and scope of organizations to ensure smaller community-based organizations can also access funding; allowing applications in Ukrainian language;
- INGOs should capitalise on opportunities to streamline due diligence processes and providing a fair share of core costs with partners, and support partners' staff and volunteers with the impacts of responding to the crisis (eg. psychosocial support)
- WRO/WLOs should include sufficient support costs, including security, translations etc. in proposals.

Additionally, donors and UN agencies should provide flexible, long term funding directly and/or through quality partnerships, to WROs/WLOs. Partnerships should enable the sharing of the same level of flexibility and duration of funding as it was received, including with core funding. Donors must also value and prioritise funding to organisations who work with marginalised vulnerable communities and those at risk of being left behind, such as women and girls.

**Increase accountability for supporting WROs/WLOs by demanding transparency on progress towards commitments for gender equality in the humanitarian response.**

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**In Ukraine, UN agencies, donors, and INGOs have made numerous commitments to localization of the humanitarian system, under the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, etc. They now have a duty to deliver and must prioritize equity, trust, and accountability, by:**

- Agreeing a definition and classification for “women’s rights organisations” in Ukraine to ensure that tracking support for WROs/WLOs is directly responding to the gendered impacts of the crisis and/or providing feminist humanitarian responses
- Setting up / identifying agency specific targets of humanitarian funding to WLOs/WROs, track them and report against them in the annual Grand Bargain self-reporting exercise
- Increasing the number of partnerships that international actors have with WROs/WLOs and the quality of these partnerships, in line with [feminist principles](#), throughout the entire funding and project cycle;
- Ensuring diversity of WROs/WLOs which receive Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) pooled funding to increase inclusion of sub-national WROs/WLOs and solidarity between larger and smaller WROs/WLOs.

**Champion and prioritize women’s leadership and safe and meaningful participation in dialogues and processes beyond the humanitarian response, including in recovery and reconstruction efforts.**

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Achieving gender equality is a fundamental aspect of sustainable relief and recovery. A systemic approach and formal engagement, including consultations and increased partnerships with locally led civil society groups, including WROs/WLOs, LGBTQIA+, Roma, older persons, youth and persons with disabilities groups, and their networks during all planning phases would result in a better contextual understanding of the barriers to inclusion, and would limit the risk of leaving marginalised vulnerable populations behind.

**Ukrainian authorities, as well as the international community including donors, and particularly those who are champions of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, must utilise their power and influence to amplify women’s voices and insist on the inclusion of their leadership in all recovery and reconstruction efforts to ensure that the needs and concerns of women and girls are not missed.** In particular, the Ukraine Recovery Conference should ensure the

active and meaningful participation of Ukrainian women's leadership and WROs/WLOs. Without such leadership, the rights and protections for women and girls in Ukraine are at risk and an opportunity to achieve gender equality will be lost.

## Signatories

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- ActionAid International
- ALLIANCE.GLOBAL, Public Organization
- All-Ukrainian Association of Local Governments «ASSOCIATION OF AMALGAMATED TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES» (AATC)
- CARE
- CIVIC ORGANIZATION "THE TENTH OF APRIL"
- Coalition "Kharkivschyna 1325"
- CSO Democracy Development Center
- Danish Refugee Council
- Divchata (NGO Girls)
- Gender Culture Centre
- HelpAge International
- Helvetas Swiss Intercoperation
- HIAS Ukraine
- ICF "Ukrainian Foundation for Public health"
- International Rescue Committee
- ODESSA REGIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ROMA CULTURE "ROMANI ZBORA"
- Oxfam
- Plan International
- Save the Children
- Voice of Romni
- Welthungerhilfe
- ZDOROVİ

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<sup>i</sup> UNOCHA, "Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024" (December 2023)

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enuk>

<sup>ii</sup> UNOCHA, "Ukraine: Humanitarian Response and Funding Snapshot (January - December 2023)" (January 2024)

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-response-and-funding-snapshot-january-december-2023-enuk>

<sup>iii</sup> CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis Ukraine (October 2023) [RGA\\_Ukraine\\_2023\\_ENG.pdf \(careevaluations.org\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> HIAS/Voice "Still Waiting for the Sky to Close: Women's Organizations at the Frontline of the Ukrainian Crisis Two Years On – Ukraine" (February 2024) <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/still-waiting-sky-close-womens-organizations-frontline-ukrainian-crisis-two-years>

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<sup>v</sup> Oxfam, “Two years at the forefront: Exploring the needs and experiences of women-led, women’s rights, and LGBTQIA+ led organizations two years into the Ukraine humanitarian response” (February 2024) <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/two-years-forefront-exploring-needs-and-experiences-women-led-womens-rights-and-lgbtqia>

<sup>vi</sup> See among others: [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(ohchr.org\)](#); [UNSDG | Leave No One Behind](#); [Updated IASC Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action | IASC \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](#)

<sup>vii</sup> Oxfam (February 2024)