



## WAR IN UKRAINE

### What can be an appropriate response to the humanitarian catastrophe in the middle of Europe?

The attack by Russian troops on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has shaken and changed the world. This war has brought physical and mental suffering to millions of people. It is destroying the livelihoods of the people of Ukraine and will have many unforeseeable political consequences for the multilateral order. The struggle for control of large cities like Kiev and Kharkiv or medium-sized cities like Mariupol will likely result in a massive increase in civilian casualties.

More than 2.8 million people, mostly women, children and elderly people, have already left Ukraine, according to the United Nations (UN) (as of 14 March), and up to 4 million people could still follow, according to the European Commission. Around 1.7 million people have fled across the border to Poland. The Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has announced investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

As the Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant on 3 March shows, major dangers emanate from the situation in Chernobyl and the 15 nuclear reactors in four plants in Ukraine. During military conflicts, targeted attacks or accidents caused by human error under stress can easily have unforeseeable and serious humanitarian, health and environmental consequences, including beyond Ukraine.

More than a dozen VENRO member organisations have been working in Ukraine since 2014. Generally, they work together with several partner organisations in the communities. The focus is on

the development of social structures to support internally displaced persons as well as psycho-social support. Besides, numerous other humanitarian organisations are currently exploring how to best provide humanitarian assistance in accessible areas of Ukraine as well as to refugees in neighbouring countries. The nationwide attack also endangers the staff of Ukrainian social organisations and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Nevertheless, they hope to be able to stay in the regions and extend their emergency relief work.

Millions of people in the Global South could also soon feel the effects of the war. Ukraine and Russia are major producers of staple foods such as wheat, maize and vegetable oils. The war in Ukraine can therefore have a massive impact on the already fragile food security in the Middle East and many African countries. Russia and Ukraine have accounted for more than 20 per cent of global wheat exports and more than 30 per cent of maize exports in recent years. This could lead to supply shortages and further price increases for staple foods, exacerbating, for example, the situation in the Horn of Africa, which is already suffering from a severe drought. The destabilisation of global energy markets will also have serious consequences for people in the Global South and could push millions of people into poverty.

The measures taken by the German government so far focus on sanctions in close coordination with the European Union (EU) and the USA, limited arms de-

liveries to Ukraine and military deterrence to avert a further expansion of the conflict to NATO member states.

VENRO welcomes the agreement to activate the Temporary Protection Directive as an EU-wide legal basis for the admission of refugees from Ukraine. However, there remains a bitter taste with people being turned away at the Polish-Belarusian border and in Croatia without being given the opportunity to apply for asylum. This is in contradiction of international law. Moreover, there are credible reports of discriminatory practices against people of non-Ukrainian nationality and origin when approaching the borders and during border crossing. Such double standards are unacceptable. All persons seeking protection must be treated equally in accordance with the applicable legal frameworks such as the Geneva Convention.

**In order to limit the humanitarian impact of the war in Ukraine, on neighbouring countries, and possibly other regions worldwide, VENRO calls for**

1. the Russian government and all other governments involved in the conflict,
  - to respect international humanitarian law. This includes the protection of civilians and civilian facilities (such as administrative buildings, water and electricity supply, hospitals, schools, and all residential areas) as well as the principle of proportionality of military action. Access for humanitarian workers and access of affected people to humanitarian assistance must be fully guaranteed. The humanitarian corridors agreed in different rounds of negotiations must be implemented with reliability and safety guaranties.
2. the federal government,
  - to include in the 2022 provisional budget a derogation for special funds for Ukraine and agree to the reallocation of funds from current development cooperation with Ukraine for humanitarian assistance, so that urgently needed aid can be provided immediately. Additional funding for Ukraine must not be at the expense of funding for other humanitarian crises or development cooperation.
  - in view of the increased complexity of further developments in Ukraine, to allocate humanitarian funds with increased flexibility with regard to the location, the type of activities and the timeframe.
  - not to implement the additional humanitarian funds through the UN alone. NGOs have established longstanding partner structures in many places and have easier and more direct access to the affected population. Ukrainian NGOs should continue to be supported for as long as possible so that urgent aid can be implemented in the communities.
  - to work with aid organisations to find practical solutions for introducing and disbursing cash in the communities to help the people forced into hardship in Ukraine.
  - to support the transparent documentation of reported and prospective violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity in cooperation with other states and the UN in

order to prepare for subsequent judicial accountability of war crimes. The Chief Prosecutor's Investigation Division should be supported with additional financial resources.

3. the European Union and the neighbouring states of Ukraine,

- to keep the borders to Ukraine's neighbouring countries open for all refugees. There must be no differentiation upon entry according to origin or residence status in Ukraine. Treatment before and after crossing the border must be non-discriminatory. Conscientious objectors from Russia or Ukraine must also be allowed to enter.
- to directly support Ukraine's neighbouring countries in receiving and catering for refugees.
- to keep the border crossings open for the import of goods.

**National and international humanitarian actors should**

- focus in particular on the situation of women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities and ensure needs-based assistance by systematically collecting data on gender, age and disability. Women and girls are particularly affected by the war and are at risk of sexual exploitation. Orphans in institutions and children on the run also face particular risks. The elderly and people with disabilities are often not reached by humanitarian activities or are not included in the planning of evacuations. Special

measures to prevent gender-based violence and human trafficking must be put in place.

- plan psycho-social measures for traumatised refugees in safe places inside Ukraine or in neighbouring countries.
- ensure that Ukrainian civilian actors can actively participate in all planning and coordination processes. Ukrainian civilian actors should continue to take the lead role in the coordination meetings of the different humanitarian clusters.

Despite the massive humanitarian impact of the war, the political and humanitarian crises in other countries and humanitarian assistance required in these contexts must not be overlooked. Additional funds for Ukraine must not be at the expense of humanitarian assistance or development cooperation for other crisis regions such as Afghanistan, the Sahel or Yemen.

The successful agreement at the EU level on the Temporary Protection Directive for refugees from Ukraine should be used as an impulse for urgently needed progress in the common European asylum system and for harmonisation of national provisions.

In light of this war, we need a political and societal debate on all prevention instruments available to us to increase national and global human security. Improved defence capacity does not contribute to solving global conflicts nor to mitigating the effects of the climate crisis or the economic consequences of the Corona crisis. There must be no cuts in funding for development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and civil crisis prevention.

To this end, the target of at least 0.7 percent for development cooperation and additional climate protection measures must be included in the federal budget. The 2022 budget for the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development must be maintained at least at the 2021 level and should continuously increase in subsequent years.

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