

### OVERVIEW

February 2024 marked two years since the onset of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as a decade since the invasion of Crimea and seizure of large parts of Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts, sparking the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Atlantic Council 14/02/2023). Ukraine was able to push back the Russian forces from the north and northeast between February–October 2022, after which the front lines changed minimally until May 2024, when a new Russian offensive started in Kharkivska oblast (ISW/CT accessed 07/06/2024). The full-scale invasion has resulted in skyrocketing humanitarian needs across the country. In 2024, an estimated 14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance; 31% are women, 20% children, 23% people over the age of 60, and 14% people with disabilities. In total, 11 million people countrywide are in need of protection services (OCHA 03/01/2024).

The international armed conflict has exposed people in Ukraine to a range of protection risks, aggravating old vulnerabilities and creating new ones. Ukrainians continue to experience air and drone attacks, most frequently in frontline and strategic areas, such as Kyiv city and Odeska and Kharkivska oblasts (ACLEDA accessed 07/06/2024). Between February 2022 and May 2024, the war had killed more than 10,000 civilians and injured over 21,000, with mines causing more than 1,100 of the cases (OHCHR 10/05/2024). Russian attacks have also damaged or destroyed almost 250,000 buildings (KSE 12/02/2024). Between February 2022 and May 2024, the Ukrainian authorities documented more than 128,000 war crimes by the Russian Federation (OPGU accessed 31/05/2024; OHCHR 31/05/2024). By 4 July 2024, there were 1,114 recorded cases of unlawful arrest, more than 19,500 abductions or kidnappings of children, and 3,464 enforced disappearances (T4P accessed 05/07/2024; GoU accessed 05/04/2024). Ukrainians have also been subject to torture or cruel, inhumane, degrading treatment or punishment in Russian-controlled areas; by December 2023, more than 104 torture chambers had been discovered, and more than 1,600 cases of torture had been reported (Ukrinform 07/12/2023).

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

#### Aim

This report presents the impact of selected protection threats on specific population groups and identifies vulnerabilities among these groups to protection risks in Ukraine between February 2022 and May 2024. By contextualising protection-related primary and secondary data, it aims to enhance the understanding of protection risks and associated vulnerabilities among humanitarian responders.

#### Methodology

This analysis is based on a secondary data review, a content analysis of legal documents, and 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2024 with key government institutions and national NGOs. ACAPS selected the protection risks after an analysis of the Ukraine Protection Monitoring Tool and an internal Danish Refugee Council protection monitoring dataset containing data from 24 April 2023 to 1 March 2024. After overlaying the identified risks, the team conducted a geographical comparison of protection incidents using ACAPS' Protection Indicators Dataset and other sources. ACAPS selected the risks based on the reported presence of protection incidents in the macroregions (centre, east, north, south, and west)<sup>1</sup>, validated through a review of humanitarian reports and interviews with Ukrainian protection stakeholders. The naming of the risks was based on a predesigned list of protection risks that the Global Protection Cluster developed, with the exception of 'destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure' (GPC accessed 11/03/2024). The team deemed it necessary to separate this risk from the risk of attacks on civilians given its severe and multidimensional impact on vulnerability.

#### Limitations

Because the selection of risks was based on reported protection incidents in four of the macroregions of Ukraine, incidents going under/unreported may have resulted in the omission of some risks or vulnerable groups. Lack of data disaggregated according to factors other than age and gender, such as disability status, displacement status, and ethnicity, might have led to the omission of some newly emerged vulnerabilities to selected protection risks.

<sup>1</sup> in accordance with the division used by IOM & OECD (11/2022)

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## KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

For this report, ACAPS understands **vulnerability** as the conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes that increase the susceptibility of a person or community to the impacts of hazards at a specific place and point in time (UNDDR accessed 19/02/2024; Biswas and Nautiyal 20/05/2023; Gordon 03/2020). No one is inherently vulnerable, but systemic factors and the conditions noted above heighten a person's vulnerability to specific risks. These factors include age, sex, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, legal status, disability, health status, ethnic or linguistic background, level of education and/or skills, and level of family/community support. These characteristics are intersectional, with some people belonging to more than one category at a time (REACH et al. 03/11/2020).

**Ukrainian law** considers the following groups of people **vulnerable**: older people; people with chronic illnesses; people with disabilities; people experiencing homelessness; people with low incomes or living in low-income households; people experiencing child abuse, domestic violence, or GBV; people who have experienced trafficking; and people who have survived disaster (man-made or natural), among others. According to the law, the provision of social services cannot be refused in the event of a threat to a person's life or health, domestic violence, GBV, or child abuse (Verkhovna Rada accessed 22/03/2024).

**Protection threat** refers to a human activity or the product of human activity that results in violence, coercion, or deliberate deprivation. Threats can be perpetrated by a person, policy, or social norm that causes harm (GPC accessed 26/02/2024).

**Protection risk** refers to the actual or potential exposure of the affected people to violence, coercion, or deliberate deprivation (GPC accessed 25/02/2024). Protection risk is a wider term encompassing threats to affected people, their vulnerabilities, and their capacities to prevent and mitigate the effects of these threats. In the context of war, protection threats and risks are interconnected, often compounding each other and leading to widespread, multifaceted impacts on affected people.

**Protection incident** refers to the detected or reported occurrence of a protection risk. Caution should be used when quoting numbers of protection incidents, as detected or reported incidents are typically much lower than the actual prevalence.

## KEY FINDINGS

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The full-scale invasion has aggravated all the vulnerabilities and risks that existed in Ukraine prior to February 2022. The full-scale invasion also resulted in the emergence of new risks and new or aggravated population groups vulnerable to said risks. This report focuses on the protection risks that have emerged since the 2022 Russian invasion – except for gender-based violence (GBV), cases of which already existed even before then – and the specific vulnerabilities of different groups to these risks.

- **People with disabilities**, especially those with restricted mobility (who face a higher risk of death or injury), are extremely vulnerable to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. People with disabilities are also more likely to stay in collective sites upon displacement because of damage to or the destruction of homes. Most collective sites are not adapted to their various needs, especially for those with mobility issues, resulting in their physical and social isolation.
- **Older people**, especially those with mobility issues and those living near the front lines, experience difficulties during evacuation. They can also be reluctant to use bomb shelters. Due to lack of savings and perceived unaffordability of living in different places, but also their emotional attachment to their places of habitual residence, they do not want to leave their houses and therefore are exposed to attacks and subsequent impacts.
- **Internally displaced people (IDPs)** are vulnerable to the risks associated with insecure housing tenure and struggle to meet their needs given high rent prices. Some IDPs living in collective sites face challenges with the compounding effects of pre-existing social vulnerabilities related to older age, disability status, single parenthood (primarily women), or belonging to the Roma ethnic group.
- **Ukrainian citizens living in occupied territories** are highly vulnerable to the risk of torture, degrading treatment, abduction, or enforced disappearance and need specialised services, including psychosocial support, because of trauma.
- Landmines and unexploded ordnance present in areas retaken by Ukraine put **farmers** at risk of death or injury while farming their contaminated lands.
- All the protection risks selected in this analysis, especially attacks on civilians and abductions, affect **children**. Attacks on civilians limit children's ability to attend school, particularly those living near the front lines, while children living in the occupied territories are at risk of abduction or forced transfer to Russia or Belarus, often for re-education purposes.
- The war has worsened protection issues of **women**, particularly gender based violence (GBV). GBV was already an issue before February 2022, but the war has aggravated certain forms and induced others, such as conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Gender intersects with many other categories (such as displacement status, ability, geography, and age), and the intersection of two or more vulnerable categories often further aggravates vulnerability.
- **LGBTQ+ people** are also at risk of GBV, as well as discrimination based on sexual and gender identity.
- **Men** face protection risks especially in the form of smuggling, which some resort to in response to the movement restrictions imposed by the Government of Ukraine (GoU) in relation to the conscription of men ages 18–60. **Men of conscription age** who cannot or refuse to fight also risk losing access to services given the fear of their exemption being revoked when they acquire or renew valid identity documentation.

## CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING VULNERABILITIES IN UKRAINE

The 2022 Russian invasion has led to the emergence of or worsened protection risks, affecting vulnerabilities. It has increased previously existing vulnerabilities and created new ones. Factors include the lack and insufficiency of people and state capacity to prevent or mitigate risks. Vulnerability to protection risks in Ukraine is a combination of the impact of protection risks and structural drivers, such as socioeconomic conditions, sociocultural norms, and institutional capability.

### Socioeconomic conditions

In 2022, the war decreased Ukraine's GDP by 30% and pulled an additional seven million people below the poverty line (USD 6.85 per day) (WB 30/11/2023). Despite an estimated 2% GDP growth marking economic stabilisation in 2023, the economic situation remained poor (IMF accessed 13/03/2024; Ministry of Economy 13/03/2023). In 2024, 14.6 million people are estimated to need humanitarian assistance, including 3.3 million people living in frontline settlements in eastern and southern Ukraine (OCHA 03/01/2024). The increase in state budget allocation to defence has reduced funding for social services, further affecting the people most in need. New regulations enforced on 1 March 2024 narrowed down the criteria for eligibility for IDP allowance, decreasing the number of IDPs eligible for government cash assistance from 2.5 million to approximately 1.5 million (Protection Cluster 10/05/2024).

### IDP allowance changes

Since 1 March 2024, IDP allowance has been automatically provided to displaced people meeting specific criteria. These include pensioners whose pension amount by 1 January 2024 did not exceed UAH 9,444 (USD 230) per month; group I or II people with disabilities;<sup>2</sup> children with disabilities under the age of 18, seriously ill children, orphans, and children under the age of 23 deprived of parental care; foster parents; and adoptive parents. People from other vulnerable groups are allowed to apply for six-month extensions to their IDP allowance (GoU 26/01/2024; MSP accessed 01/03/2024).

2 There are three disability groups in Ukraine (I, II, and III). Group assignment depends on the degree of persistent impairment of bodily functions (with group I having the highest degree) caused by illness, trauma (its consequences), or congenital reasons or the possible limitation of everyday activities while communicating with the outside environment caused by the loss of health (Verkhovna Rada 2006).

### Sociocultural norms

Ukrainian culture is patriarchal, and gendered cultural norms posit men as the breadwinner and women as the carer. Gendered stereotypes have deepened during the war, with men fighting on the frontline and defending the country strengthening masculine roles while women take care of the home and children (PI 19/02/2024). Patriarchal norms that normalise discrimination and violence against women and girls also remain widespread in Ukraine, and the resulting humanitarian crisis from the war compounds existing gender inequalities (SeeD 31/12/2021). The Roma community, comprising 100,000–300,000 people (0.3–0.8% of the total population) by June 2024, also experiences discrimination and marginalisation (UNHCR 09/01/2024; REYN accessed 28/06/2024; UNFPA accessed 28/06/2024). This discrimination extends to all levels of society, including police, prosecutors, and officials. Society uses the poverty, substandard living conditions, and unemployment that the Roma people experience to justify such discrimination, attributing these conditions to the Roma ethnicity instead of the systemic inequalities that they face (REYN accessed 28/06/2024; MRGE 08/05/2019).

### Institutional capability

Institutional capability refers to the ability and effectiveness of government institutions to address challenges, protect citizens, and meet their needs (Somanathan and Natarajan 03/2022). In Ukraine, state and governmental institutions are functioning, although the war and associated protection risks have aggravated existing structural problems in the country.

- Social housing policy in Ukraine hampers access to more stable non-temporary accommodation for displaced people and those with damaged or destroyed houses (Cedos 22/03/2023).
- The war has aggravated the insufficiency of institutional GBV prevention and response, such as the police reporting system, safe shelters, and other services for GBV survivors.
- Organisational, material, technical, and procedural issues within the judiciary result in much slower court handling of the cases of civilians seeking justice (Ombudsman of Ukraine 2022).
- The country faces institutional corruption, including of the judiciary, despite an improved track record in 2023 (TI accessed 30/06/2024; FP 06/03/2024).
- Insufficient institutional coordination, equipment, personnel, and financial resources hamper demining activities in areas contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) (OSW 22/11/2023; ACAPS 24/01/2024).

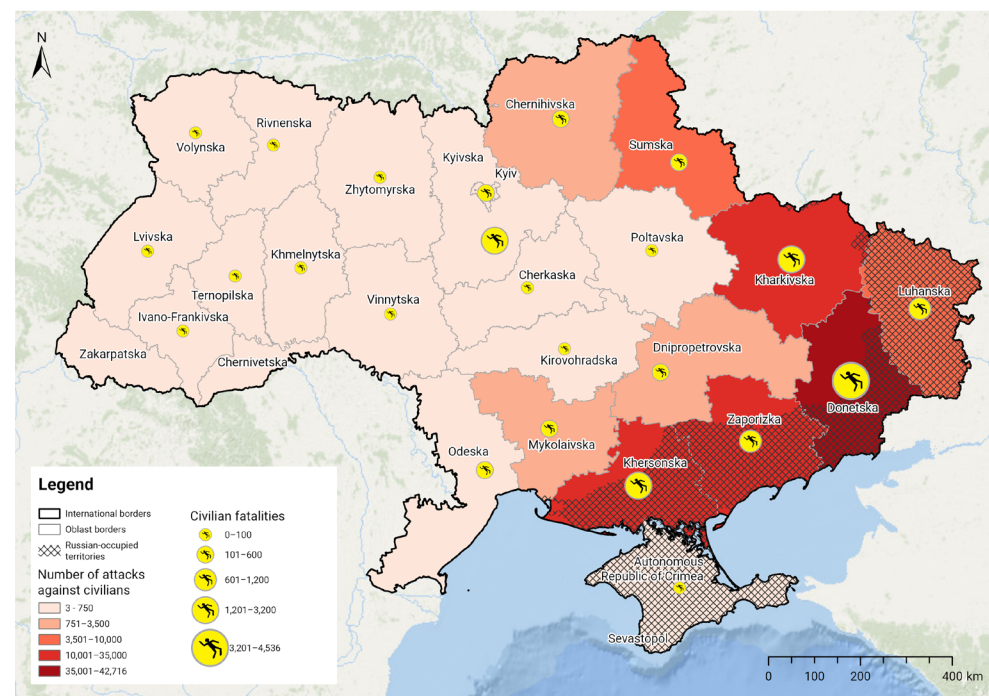
Since 2014, Ukraine has digitalised many public services and information about these to provide people with public services in times of war (OECD 06/02/2024). These include alerting people about aerial attacks and displaying the location of the nearest bomb shelters (Rubryka 08/02/2024). Despite this, some people still face challenges in accessing information about services, especially older people who struggle to learn and use new technologies and people who do not have a device with internet access or in areas with limited or restricted connectivity (OHCHR 24/05/2023; Brookings 07/02/2024; EC 08/11/2023; UNDP 26/01/2024).

### Institutional capability in the occupied territories

One of the biggest limitations for state institutions stems from the Russian occupation, namely that the Ukrainian Government does not have control over the occupied territories. Russia, as an occupying power, began applying its own policies, laws, and practices on 30 September 2022, after the illegal annexation of controlled areas of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhanska, and Zaporizka oblasts (OHCHR 24/03/2023). They had exercised the same practice in Crimea after the illegal annexation of the territory on 18 March 2014 (UN 28/02/2024; UN HRC 03/07/2024). This has limited the range of Ukrainian state institutions and social services accessible from the occupied territories, hampering or preventing access to the basic and social services provided by Ukraine and further aggravating vulnerability, especially for people reliant on pensions and social assistance (EBU 16/11/2023; OSW 10/11/2023). Ukrainian citizens who have rejected Russian passports have reported a lack of access to healthcare, education, employment, bank services, pensions, and judiciary services.

## MAIN PROTECTION RISKS IN UKRAINE

Map 1. Attacks against civilians and civilian fatalities of attacks in Ukraine between 24 February and 24 May 2024



Sources: ACAPS using data from ISW (accessed 20/06/2024); ACLED (accessed 20/06/2024)

### Attacks on civilians

Between 24 February 2022 and May 2024, attacks by the Russian forces killed at least 11,100 civilians and injured close to 21,900. Men accounted for nearly half of adult civilian fatalities (5,347), and women for nearly one-third (3,283). The sex of the remaining 17% remains unknown. Most civilian fatalities (77%) occurred in Ukrainian-controlled territories. In May 2024, the war killed 174 people and injured 690, the highest numbers since July 2023. The increase was a result of the Russian ground offensive and intensification of air attacks in Kharkivska oblast, where the majority of casualties were reported (OHCHR 07/06/2024). Mass graves were discovered in liberated territories, specifically in Kyivska and Kharkivska oblasts, which respectively held 1,374 and 941 fatalities (NPU 15/03/2023).



## Destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure

Between 24 February 2022 and 21 June 2024, over 99,800 conflict events were recorded in Ukraine. These included air and drone strikes, armed clashes, and shelling events, with most attacks occurring in the eastern macroregion, followed by the south and the north (ACLEDD accessed 03/07/2024). These attacks have hit residential buildings, medical and educational facilities, churches, theatres, train stations, grocery stores, and cafes, with significant numbers of casualties (HRW 22/03/2023; AP 04/05/2022; NYT 03/06/2024).

By January 2024, the hostilities had damaged or destroyed almost 250,000 buildings, including 222,000 private houses and 27,000 apartment buildings. The most affected regions were in the eastern (Donetska, Luhanska, Kharkivska), southern (Khersonska), and northern oblasts (Chernihivska and Kyivska) (KSE 12/02/2024). The damage and destruction affected 10% of the housing stock in the country and had led to or prolonged the displacement of more than ten million people by May 2024 (WB 15/02/2024; UNHCR accessed 10/06/2024; IOM accessed 10/06/2024).

## Torture or cruel, inhumane, degrading treatment or punishment of civilians and prisoners of war

The Russian Armed Forces and other armed groups have systematically employed methods of persecution and **torture** across the occupied territories; in a Mobile Justice Team report from August 2023, 43% of torture survivors specifically referenced torture, including sexual violence, in detention centres (Ukrainska Pravda 18/01/2024; Reuters 02/08/2023). They also reported psychological torture, along with poor detention conditions and food (UN HRC 05/03/2024; UN 10/09/2023). The Russian forces also executed some detained people without trial, and their bodies showed evidence of torture (HRW accessed 27/02/2024).

Torture or cruel, inhumane, degrading treatment or punishment has been used as a war tactic against both the **Ukrainian civilian population and prisoners of war in Russian-occupied territories**. By 7 December 2023, Ukrainian law enforcement officers had revealed 104 torture chambers in eight oblasts retaken by Ukraine. Most were located in Kharkivska (25), Zaporizka (18), Khersonska (11), and Donetska (10) oblasts (Ukrinform 07/12/2023). There remains limited information on the Russian-occupied territories.

To a lesser degree, the situation of **Russian prisoners of war in Ukraine** is under scrutiny by both the Ombudsman of Ukraine and the OHCHR. Cases of torture or ill-treatment in transit facilities have been reported, including beatings, the use of electric shocks, mock executions, and threats of sexual violence (OHCHR 26/03/2023).

## Abductions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, and detentions

Members of the Russian forces and armed groups contracted by the Russian Government have committed abductions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, and detentions in the occupied territories (UN 24/03/2023; Zmina 01/06/2023). Cases of enforced disappearances have been revealed in areas under the current or previous control of Russian forces: by 28 June 2024, the most were in Kharkivska (2,084 or over half of all reported cases), followed by Khersonska (539), Zaporizka (291), Kyivska (204), Donetska (188), Luhanska (54), Chernihivska (38), Mykolaivska (31), Sumska (17), Odeska (4), Poltavska (1), and Zhytomyrska (1) oblasts (T4P accessed 28/06/2024). The actual number of cases is likely significantly higher. By 31 May 2024, more than 37,000 Ukrainians were missing, including 19,500 children, 14,000 civilians, and prisoners of war (OHCHR 31/05/2024; TKI 16/04/2024 and 30/06/2024; MI 16/05/2024; GoU accessed 05/04/2024). Between February 2022 and June 2024, there were 1,114 recorded cases of unlawful detention and 3,464 recorded cases of enforced disappearance (TKI 16/04/2024; T4P accessed 05/07/2024).

## Presence of mines and other explosive ordnance

**Ukraine is one of the world's most landmine-contaminated countries, with contamination increasing substantially after 24 February 2022** (CMC/ICBL 14/11/2023). Landmines have been documented in 11 of 27 oblasts,<sup>3</sup> with landmines contaminating approximately 29% of Ukraine's total land area (174,000km<sup>2</sup>) (BBC 11/04/2023; Ukraine Now 19/08/2022). The February 2022 Russian invasion has also increased it with explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination. By 31 May 2024, there were at least 1,200 casualties from mines and ERW, including 368 deaths and 847 injuries (OHCHR 07/06/2024). Most fatalities were recorded in Donetska, Kharkivska, and Khersonska oblasts (ACLEDD 04/04/2024).

## Gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence

**GBV** includes rape, sexual assault, physical assault, forced marriage, psychological and emotional abuse, and the denial of resources, opportunities, or services (GBVIMS accessed 21/03/2024). **Conflict-related sexual violence** (CRSV) refers to "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict" (UNHCR 11/2022).

<sup>3</sup> The 11 oblasts are Chernihivska, Dnipropetrovska, Donetska, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Kyivska, Luhanska, Mykolaivska, Odeska, Sumska, and Zaporizka.

In Ukraine, **intimate partner violence** is the most commonly reported type of GBV, with 18% of women and girls ages 15–49 reporting experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime (WHO 04/10/2022). Actual rates of domestic violence are much higher; approximately two million people in Ukraine are affected, and 600 women die yearly as a result (Ombudsman of Ukraine Telegram 25/11/2022). There has been a sharp increase in reported cases of domestic violence since the beginning of 2023, with a number of reports in 2022 remaining unfollowed (Opendatabot 19/06/2024; Gwara Media accessed 30/04/2024; Reuters 03/08/2023; Time 13/03/2023). This increase is attributed to unemployment and limited livelihood access, substance abuse, and stress related to the war and/or protracted displacement (Hromadske 11/01/2024; Human Rights First 06/12/2023; UN 11/2021; Capasso et al. 06/05/2022). Insufficient psychological support for Ukrainian veterans returning from the front lines and experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder has also contributed to this increase (KII 05/03/2024; Intent 27/07/2023). In 2016, over 30% of the women whose partners returned from the front line experienced GBV (IPWR 11/07/2022). It is important to note that obtaining prevalence data on GBV is challenging. An increase in reporting is sometimes related to the improvement of access to services, but GBV usually tends to be underreported.

**CRSV** has existed in Ukraine since the 2014 invasion but has increased since the 2022 full-scale invasion, often as a form of torture. It includes rape and threats of rape, sexual violence and sexual harassment, forced nudity, and genital electrocution (GRC 03/08/2023). Such incidents tend to come to light whenever Ukraine regains control over previously occupied territories. Civilian detainees in occupied territories and Ukrainian prisoners of war are especially at risk of CRSV (OHCHR 26/03/2024). By December 2023, the Office of the Prosecutor General in Ukraine had recorded 252 cases of CRSV. The real scale of CRSV is likely much bigger, and underreporting is related to the stigma on experiences perceived as humiliating, fear of being accused of collaboration, and negative experiences of survivors with dealing with local police and prosecution personnel (GIJTR 03/2024).

## Forced displacement

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has forcibly displaced millions both within the country and abroad. In May 2024, there were 6.5 million refugees from Ukraine recorded globally and 3.5 million IDPs in the country (UNHCR accessed 10/06/2024; IOM accessed 10/06/2024). By April, 4.7 million previously displaced Ukrainians had returned to their places of habitual residence (IOM 30/05/2024).

IDPs tend to stay within their macroregion or oblast of origin and change hromadas or raions (IOM 30/05/2024 and 05/06/2023). In April 2024, the five oblasts with the highest number of people fleeing their homes were Donetsk, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Luhanska, and Zaporizka. Regions receiving the most IDPs were Dnipropetrovska (14%), Kharkivska (12%), Kyivska (8%) and Zaporizka (7%) oblasts, and Kyiv city (10%). Most (59%) IDPs were female (IOM 30/05/2024).

## Unlawful impediments or restrictions to freedom of movement and human smuggling

**Siege** is a military tactic involving surrounding an area and restricting the flow of essential goods to compel surrender (GPC accessed 22/02/2024).

**Human smuggling** entails providing services (such as transportation or fake documentation) to people seeking illegal entry into another country and involves the voluntary participation of the people who use smuggling networks (MPI 02/2014).

Russia has used siege tactics on multiple occasions since the February 2022 invasion, specifically in Avdiivka, Bakhmut, Mariupol, and Severodonetsk, preventing people from fleeing the locations (El País 20/02/2024; CBC 19/06/2022; NYT 24/07/2022). Restrictions to freedom of movement in Ukraine are also related to the mobilisation law and the ban on male citizens ages 18–60 to leave the country. As a consequence, some people have turned to human smuggling networks to leave the country and seek protection abroad. People being smuggled are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and their safety and lives are frequently put at risk. Sometimes, human smuggling becomes human trafficking (DHS/DOT 12/2022; UNODC accessed 11/03/2024).

## Impediments and/or restrictions to accessing legal identity documentation

To be able to exercise their social, economic, and political rights, people need proof of their legal identity in the form of civil and legal documents. These include government-issued identity cards, passports, birth and death certificates, marriage certificates, and deeds of property ownership. **In areas under the control of the GoU**, members of the Roma community, children born in the areas close to the front lines, and IDPs face issues with accessing civil and legal documentation (DFS/IMPACT 05/03/2024). Without a Ukrainian identity document, people cannot access education, healthcare, and employment in Ukraine. They also cannot access government assistance and services, including pensions and other social benefits. In some instances, the lack of identity documentation can also lead to the denial of access to humanitarian assistance (Protection Cluster 11/01/2024).

**In the occupied territories**, Russia has established control over civil documentation and registration. Children born in these territories receive Russian birth certificates and are automatically recognised as Russian citizens; by June 2023, there were 300,000 such children recorded (Ombudsman of Ukraine 07/05/2023; MinRe 20/07/2023). The GoU does not recognise these certificates, nor Russian death, marriage, and divorce certificates (MinRe 20/07/2023).

## POPULATION GROUPS AND THEIR VULNERABILITY TO PROTECTION RISKS

### Older people

Older people in Ukraine are highly vulnerable to protection risks, and approximately 25% of the country's population is over 60. **Older people have been disproportionately represented among casualties of attacks**, particularly in areas close to the front lines. Although they represented 25% of the population, they comprised 42% of civilian casualties near the front line by February 2024 (OHCHR 26/03/2024). The causes of this situation are linked with age; older people are less likely, willing, or able to leave their homes during attacks, making them a higher proportion of civilians staying behind during active hostilities (ACCESS accessed 07/03/2024). Possible factors are emotional attachment, evacuation difficulties, lack of information about the existing support in receiving locations, or a lack of available and affordable alternative housing (Zavriukha et al. 27/06/2023; NRC 21/02/2024). Information about evacuation plans and routes are not always accessible or adapted to the needs of older people and tend to be shared via social media, which are often inaccessible or unused by this group (AI 06/12/2022; Diia accessed 14/03/2024). Many older people refuse to evacuate from areas exposed to shelling or ground combat. There have been reports of older people living in housing without electricity, gas, or running water and with damaged windows or roofs (AI 22/06/2022).

**Older people in frontline areas also struggle to access healthcare facilities, grocery stores, and pharmacies** mainly because of the insecure situation but also given a lack of transport and the unaffordability of medicine and food products following price increases (AI 06/12/2022; KII 05/03/2023). Many are alone after their children left, resulting in feelings of isolation and lack of support (KII 05/03/2024). Once evacuated, older people experience a lack of care because of the lack of home-based care services, especially in southern and eastern Ukraine (Protection Cluster meeting 12/06/2024).

**Among those whose homes have been damaged or destroyed, older people are some of the most vulnerable** because their pensions tend to be well below subsistence levels, resulting in them spending a higher share of their income on housing than others, especially when displaced (IOM 30/06/2023; Cedos 08/12/2022).

### Children

The total number of child casualties of shelling has continued to increase since February 2022. **By May 2024, shelling had killed 608 children and injured close to 1,400** (HRW accessed 30/05/2024; KSE et al. 09/05/2024). Those living in conflict zones in Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Kherson oblasts (along with their parents or legal guardians) have been subject to compulsory evacuations in line with the evacuation procedure in case of the threat or occurrence of emergencies (KMU 07/03/2023).

**Attacks seriously hamper children's education access** (UNICEF 22/02/2024). Access to a bomb shelter is a requirement for educational facilities to provide in-person classes (ACAPS 18/08/2022). Children living in frontline oblasts and IDP children are the most affected, with most of their education occurring online (Protection Cluster et al. 07/12/2023; WVI 02/2023). In June 2023, around 200,000 children did not have education access because their families could not afford electronic devices, with the issue being the most serious in Dnipropetrovska and Kharkiv oblasts (Protection Cluster et al. 07/12/2023; WVI 02/2023; Ukrinform 27/06/2023). Frequent attacks also affect children's mental health, especially for those living in frontline areas and near the Russian border (UNICEF 22/02/2024).

**Children are also vulnerable to the risk of injury from landmines and ERW** and make up one in eight casualties in Ukraine (STC 04/04/2023). Most children in Russian-occupied territories or territories retaken by Ukraine are vulnerable to the risks associated with ERW and landmines, as children tend to gather firewood, collect water, or graze cattle in possibly contaminated fields (KSE et al. 09/05/2024; PHC 01/06/2022; Zmina 22/04/2022). Some children also seek to impress their peers by visiting dangerous locations, playing with ammunition or explosive objects, and throwing stones at ERW (PHC 01/06/2022; Zmina 22/04/2022). Children often lack knowledge and information about preventive methods, though humanitarian organisations have implemented landmine risk awareness campaigns and education. It is difficult to assess scale or impact of these campaigns (STC 18/12/2023; UNICEF 14/08/2023).

An estimated **150,000–300,000 children were forcibly transferred within the Russian-occupied territories or deported to Russia by the first quarter of 2023** (Ukrinform 17/02/2023; Rubryka 23/04/2023). This remains the latest publicly available information. By October 2023, at least 2,100 children had been forcibly deported from the Russian-occupied territories to Belarus (Yale University 27/11/2023; European Parliament 13/09/2023; OHCHR 19/10/2023). Children living in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are most vulnerable to forcible transfer or deportation, though Russia refers to these as the 'evacuations' of children from active conflict zones in other eastern and southern oblasts and Kyivska (MOD 23/04/2022; Ukrinform 31/07/2023; KHISR 10/2023). Most unlawful deportations and transfers have occurred under the guise of sending children to 'recreation camps' (Yale University 14/02/2023). Children whose caregivers have gone missing during forced evacuation are especially at risk, as are children



whose caregivers are suspected of cooperation with Ukraine and children in residential institutions (Yale University 14/02/2023; Current Time 01/06/2023; E-IR 15/06/2023; KHISR 10/2023). Children from residential institutions, separated and unaccompanied children, and children forcibly separated from their carers are least likely to have been returned to Ukraine (Yale University 14/02/2023; Current Time 01/06/2023; UNGA 19/10/2023). By June 2024, only 388 children had been returned to areas under GoU control (GoU accessed 28/06/2024).

**Children who have been forcibly transferred or deported and reside in camps in the Russian-occupied territories or Russia are vulnerable to violence**, with reports of beatings, imprisonment, food and water deprivation, and the denial of the ability to contact their families (VICE 01/05/2023; The Telegraph 17/07/2023; CNN 09/04/2023; OHCHR 19/10/2023). Forcibly transferred and deported children have also been subjected to pro-Russian re-education (indoctrination) (Yale University 14/02/2023; Yale University 16/11/2023; VICE 01/05/2023; Telegraph 17/07/2023). Some have also been issued Russian passports and adopted or placed in foster care in Russia (VICE 01/05/2023; OSCE 04/05/2023).

## Women

Women are at risk of all the protection risks discussed in this report. By May 2024, attacks had killed at least 3,200 civilian women and injured around 5,100 (OHCHR 07/06/2024). Women are also less likely to have access to bomb shelters and are especially vulnerable to risks at nighttime. These risks include missile strikes and concerns about safety on the streets, which make them less likely to leave their homes and seek shelter (SeeD 16/01/2024; DFS/IMPACT 05/03/2024; CARE/UN Women 04/05/2022).

**Women are the most vulnerable to GBV** (GoU 26/11/2023). This is aggravated by other factors, including displacement status (with IDP women being more vulnerable), geographic location (with women living in rural areas and in the Russian-occupied territories or near the front lines being more vulnerable), age (especially older women), disability, pregnancy, being a single mother, belonging to a minority group (especially the Roma ethnicity), and gender identity or sexuality (members of the LGBTQ+ community) (CARE/UN Women 02/01/2024; CARE 10/2023; UNFPA 2022; KII 22/02/2024; KII 05/03/2024; KII 06/03/2024). For example, **displaced women** residing in collective sites are at risk of GBV because of unsafe living conditions and lack of privacy, with multiple families sharing the same room with only 6m<sup>2</sup> per person and no lockers (IOM 15/12/2023). In an October 2023 report, 61% of collective shelters countrywide reported a lack of gender-segregated rooms, mostly in the northern and central macroregions (Ombudsman of Ukraine 22/02/2024; CCCM Cluster 2024). A lack of bathing facilities and gender-segregated toilets and washrooms were also reported in the southern, eastern, and central macroregions (IOM/NRC 11/2023). **Women living in rural areas** are at heightened risk of GBV because of a lack of information on (and access to) protection services and legal aid, geographical distance from

urban centres, limited access to primary and secondary healthcare, and cultural stereotypes and stigma. All of these impede access to GBV services and hinder GBV case management (UNFPA 2022; KII 26/02/2024; KII 06/03/2024; KII 05/03/2024). Women who are economically dependent on their partners are also at higher risk of experiencing GBV (UNECE 15/06/2023).

**Women and girls living in occupied territories and frontline areas are also at heightened risk of experiencing CRSV**, which has been used as a weapon of war (Office of the Prosecutor General 25/09/2023; GoU accessed 30/10/2023).

Despite the inclusion of GBV services into the humanitarian response, challenges in accessing them still exist, especially in areas near to the frontlines (GPPI 26/06/2024; KII 06/03/2024; KII 05/03/2024). Constraints in accessing GBV services and support result from a lack of experts; the inadequate knowledge, awareness, and training of the responsible institutions, particularly police workers and medical staff; the delay or absence of mental health and psychological support; redirection to local social assistance services that are underskilled or not skilled to manage GBV cases; and insufficient long-term funding (UNFPA 2022; KII 26/02/2024; KII 06/03/2024; KII 05/03/2024; KII 07/03/2024).

## Men

Men have also been affected by all the protection risks included in this report and are vulnerable to certain risks, such as attacks on civilians, torture, CRSV, restrictions on freedom of movement, and smuggling.

**Men account for the largest number of civilian fatalities during attacks**, by May comprising 60% (5,347) of the total number of fatalities since February 2022 (OHCHR 07/06/2024 and 21/02/2024). Farmers, who are majority men, face a heightened risk of ERW and landmines; they are more likely than others to hit anti-tank mines, as fields present a greater demining challenge than roads and residential areas (ACLEDD 04/04/2024; FAO 2021).

**Mobilisation efforts significantly affect men**, resulting in movement restrictions, self-imposed isolation, and, in some cases, human smuggling, which makes them vulnerable to the associated risks (DRC 04/2024). **Ukrainian men of conscription age (18–60) are most likely to use human smuggling networks to flee the country**, paying between USD 5,000–10,000 to pass Ukrainian passport control or be transported across less well-guarded sections of the border (GOCl accessed 11/03/2024; The Economist 24/04/2023; Ukrinform 28/12/2023). There have also been reports of people squeezing themselves into secret compartments in vehicles, dressing as women to sneak past border checkpoints, and entering into marriages with relatives with a disability (also a protection risk for women with disabilities) to try to exit the country as carers (TWP 08/12/2023; Suspilne 17/01/2024). By 31 August 2023, approximately 20,000 men of conscription age had illegally crossed the border and left Ukraine, and more than 21,000 had

been apprehended while trying to leave, mostly to Romania or Moldova (Suspilne 17/11/2023; BBC 17/11/2023). By 14 February 2024, 25 Ukrainian men had died attempting to cross the border into the EU (DPSU 20/09/2023; UNIAN 14/02/2024).

**Men of conscription age are unable to renew or request the issuance of civil or legal documents if they have not registered at the conscription office.** Men who have acquired an exemption may be afraid to renew their documents for fear that their exemption may be revoked, and IDP men may refuse to register as IDPs because they do not want to disclose their address to avoid conscription officer visits. This affects their ability to access employment, services, or social and humanitarian assistance. Men who cannot obtain legal documentation often work informally, rendering them vulnerable to exploitative or abusive work conditions (KII 05/03/2024b).

**Men and boys are also at heightened risk of CRSV.** In the majority of documented CRSV cases, survivors were men and boys (both among prisoners of war and civilians) (OHCHR 12/12/2023). Actual CRSV rates are likely higher than the numbers reported because men tend to be more reluctant to disclose surviving sexual assault given cultural norms and taboos around reporting (Suspilne 30/01/2023; ULAF 26/10/2022).

## People with disabilities

**People with disabilities, with approximately three million in Ukraine, are extremely vulnerable to protection risks (especially attacks) and were already vulnerable before the 2022 invasion (UNDP 10/06/2024; WB 03/2023). Between February 2022 and February 2023, 130,000 people acquired disability status, also as an effect of war-related injuries. The number continues to increase (WB 03/2023; UNDP 10/06/2024).** People with physical disabilities are at risk of sexual, economic, and psychological violence, and people with mental disabilities are at heightened risk of sexual exploitation (FFR 20/04/2023). They face barriers in accessing emergency information, shelters, and safe havens. By 8 February 2024, only 8% of Ukraine's 60,000 bomb shelters were completely accessible to people with disabilities (GoU 08/02/2024; TyKyiv 24/02/2024). They lack the necessary modifications, including ramps, grab bars in toilets, and sufficient space for wheelchairs. Evacuation itself is also challenging, especially for people with limited mobility (OHCHR 14/04/2022; AI 01/12/2023; KII 05/03/2024a).

**People with disabilities in frontline areas** have been more at risk of physical assault (13%) and have a higher likelihood of having been robbed (20%) compared to the people without disabilities living there and people with disabilities living in other areas (4% and 12%, respectively). People with disabilities in frontline areas are also more exposed to the risk of domestic and physical abuse than those without disabilities (UNDP 10/06/2024).

**The war-induced economic downturn and lack of livelihood opportunities have increased household dependence on social benefits, which are insufficient to meet the needs of people with disabilities reliant on a carer.** Households with a member with a disability in the south and east macroregions were more likely to report that safety and security had greatly affected their livelihoods than other households (UNDP 12/06/2023). By December 2023, **nearly one-third of IDP households reported at least one member with a disability (IOM 08/02/2024).** Despite the high number of IDPs with disabilities, by April 2023, they were only 3% of all people receiving protection assistance (FMR 09/2023). Collective shelters are often physically inaccessible to older IDPs with disabilities and lack the staff to adequately support them. This has resulted in older people with disabilities moving into state residential care institutions. Between February–July 2022 alone, at least 4,000 older people were placed in state institutions after they lost their homes during the war (AI 06/12/2022). IDPs with disabilities residing in institutions are especially vulnerable given poor living conditions and standards of care in Ukraine's residential care system. Many institutions lack suitable evacuation plans and routes, and the war has intensified existing protection issues, including neglect, physical and sexual violence, and exploitation (FMR 09/2023).

## LGBTQ+ people

**LGBTQ+ people continue to experience violence,** though the number of reported cases decreased in 2023 compared to 2022 (NASH SVIT 01/2024). While societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community have improved, these people still experience social stigma. It is important to note that the proportion of Ukrainians agreeing that LGBTQ+ people should have equal rights has increased significantly, from 33.7% in 2018 to 63.7% in 2022 (Insight 15/02/2023). This may be because LGBTQ+ people have joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine and for further integration with the EU, with the perception that the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people is in line with European values (NASH SVIT 15/06/2023).

LGBTQ+ people experiencing violence may be unable or unwilling to report it given stigma or a lack of available reporting mechanisms (NASH SVIT/Outright International 01/02/2024; ACAPS accesses 14/03/2024). In the occupied territories, the reported decrease in violence against LGBTQ+ people is likely because they are forced to hide their identity and do not have safe avenues for reporting; Russian anti-LGBTQ+ policy<sup>4</sup> means that those living in occupied territories likely face an elevated risk of violence – both individual and state-sanctioned (Reuters 01/12/2023; Insight 07/02/2024).

<sup>4</sup> This includes a 2013 law banning the dissemination of information related to LGBTQ+ to minors, with the 2022 amendment extending the range of the dissemination ban to adults. In 2023, the Russian Supreme Court decision designated the "international LGBT movement" as extremist; with related practices fined and people detained based on these laws (HRW 15/02/2024 and 25/11/2022).

**Transgender men and women face particular** struggles to change identity documents confirming their gender. Those who apply for a change of identity documents face long wait times and substantial delays because the state system is overburdened. This also increases the risk of conscription for transgender women whom the State continues to identify as male. Transgender women with identity documents stating that they are male cannot cross the border. Transgender men can cross the borders only with medical documentation confirming their gender dysphoria; on this basis, they can be recognised as unfit for military service (Gender in Detail 31/10/2024; OD 08/02/2023; KII 05/03/2024b).

## Ethnic and national minorities

Large displacement and outdated population census data from 2001 means it is not possible to assess the exact number of people belonging to national or ethnic minority groups currently living in Ukraine. In 2001, 22% of the total population of the country were non-ethnic Ukrainians: 17% were Russian, while the other 5% were Belarusian, Moldovan, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Polish, Jewish, Romanian, Armenian, Hungarian, Roma, or other (WDC accessed 14/06/2024; MRG accessed 14/06/2024). Crimean Tatars and Roma are especially vulnerable to protection risks caused or aggravated by the war.

Most Crimean Tatars live in Crimea, where their population is estimated to be between 248,000–284,000. Since 2014, **Russian forces and the occupying authorities have repressed and exerted pressure on Crimean Tatars given their pro-Ukraine stance and historical animosity with Russia.** By 11 December 2023 (and since 2017), there had been 1,210 detentions, 1,054 arrests, and 1,999 violations of the right to a fair trial targeted at Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea. There have also been more than 380 reports of violations of the right to healthcare access and more than 290 reported forced deportations to Russia (CTRC 10/12/2023).

**Roma people are at heightened risk of the protection risks included in this report,** but there is a lack of disaggregated data on the full scale of impacts that the people belonging to this group experience. Existing information confirms that having Roma origin increases the risk of experiencing GBV for women and girls (CARE/UN Women 02/01/2024; CARE 10/2023; UNFPA 2022; KII 22/02/2024; KII 05/03/2024; KII 06/03/2024). Some Roma women do not complete their education because of pressure or coercion within their communities to get married and have children. Roma women also often experience material and psychological dependence on their husbands and family and continue to have limited access to protection services, with displaced Roma women reporting facing discrimination when accessing protection services (Voice of Romni 24/04/2024; UNDP 12/06/2023).

**Displaced Roma people struggle to access basic services** and may experience discrimination when seeking accommodation; there have been reports of some communal shelters refusing to accept Roma IDPs (UNDP 12/06/2023). Displaced Roma people also struggle to register as IDPs or enrol their children in schools given the lack of proper identification documentation. Between 40,000–80,000 Roma living in Ukraine lack the civil documentation necessary to acquire Ukrainian citizenship or prove their residency (The Brussels Times 13/04/2024).