

Thematic report

Internal displacement in Ukraine

12 August 2014

Summary

This report presents views on displacement and future expectations of around 400 internally displaced persons, interviewed by the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) in thirteen Ukrainian regions between 18 June and 19 July 2014.

The number of IDPs in Ukraine has increased dramatically since the beginning of June. UNHCR estimates that in early August the number of registered IDPs was over 117,000 persons. There is a high discrepancy in numbers due to lack of centralised registration. Many IDPs also refrain from registering for various reasons. IDPs are predominantly women and children.

Assistance to IDPs comes predominantly from Ukrainian regions' authorities and civil society actors. The central government of Ukraine has stepped up its co-ordination efforts since late June. International assistance to IDPs remains modest. While current efforts provide reasonable housing as well as food and non-food assistance to IDPs, the agencies providing the assistance are running out of assets. The approaching school year and cooler seasons introduce additional challenges for IDPs.

Direct experience of violence and perception of imminent threat was the main reason why people decided to leave their home regions. Protecting children from traumatizing events and worsening living conditions was also decisive. Only the most important items were brought along.

Internally displaced persons from Crimea are not expecting to be able to return home in the near future. Most IDPs from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions expressed their intention to return home as soon as the security situation allows, reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure and houses is started and public services start functioning.

Interviewed IDPs raised their concern over emerging critical voices towards displaced persons in some host regions. They also stressed the need for reconciliation in their home communities to enable the communities divided by the conflict to cohabit peacefully.

Details

Internal displacement in Ukraine

This report aims to provide an overview of the current situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine. The first part of the report briefly describes the current IDP situation, the normative framework in place to guarantee the rights of IDPs, and ongoing efforts to assist internally displaced persons. The second part of the report gives voice to IDPs themselves – based on interviews with IDPs from Ukraine’s eastern regions and Crimea, it outlines the IDPs’ own perceptions of their current situation and future plans.

The SMMU teams interviewed, either individually or through focus group discussions (FGDs), some 400 internally displaced persons in a month (18 June to 19 July 2014).¹ More than half of participants were adult women, around 25% adult men, and the rest were children of various ages, accompanied by their parents. The interviews were conducted in the current places of residence of IDPs (sanatoriums, dormitories or private houses), or, in a few cases, at cafes or office premises of local NGOs that provided sufficient privacy for the discussion. All interviews were conducted in full confidentiality by the SMM monitors. Thirty participants were ethnically Crimean Tatars, six Metskhetan Turks and ten Roma. The vast majority of interviewees came from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The SMMU also wishes to thank the office of United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), Ukrainian regional authorities and several civil society groups that helped to facilitate the interviews.

IDP situation in Ukraine

The SMM does not systematically gather numbers of internally displaced populations. The lack of a centralised registration system causes discrepancies in IDP numbers. UNHCR and Ukrainian state authorities gather statistics on registered IDPs, but both acknowledge that there are significant discrepancies and a great deal of fluctuation in numbers. On 5 August the Ukrainian governmental Interagency Co-ordination Headquarters stated that the number of IDPs from eastern Ukrainian regions was 83,494 persons. In comparison, on 4 August UNHCR estimated that the number of IDPs from eastern Ukraine was 102,624 persons. Additionally, 15,286 persons, or 13 % of the total number of IDPs in Ukraine, had been displaced from Crimea. It is clear, however, that there has been a dramatic increase of IDPs from the eastern regions since early June – on 6 June 2014 UNHCR recorded that the number of IDPs from the eastern regions was just 2,649 persons.

Governmental and non-governmental agencies working with IDP issues assess that, in reality, the number of IDPs is two to three times higher, as the above numbers only include persons who have registered with regional authorities for assistance. Many displaced persons interviewed by the SMMU were not registered. Some perceive their displacement as temporary, hoping to return home by the end of summer – they rely on help from relatives and friends, and spend their own

¹ SMMU monitors conducting the interviews received training from the UNHCR office in Ukraine. The training material was based on the OSCE-UNHCR *Protection Checklist: Addressing Displacement and Protection of Displaced Populations and Affected Communities along the Conflict Cycle: a collaborative approach*. (Available online <http://www.osce.org/cpc/111464>).

savings to cover the costs of their stay. Some are reluctant to register, fearing consequences, such as confiscation of property by separatist groups at home or conscription of men to the Ukrainian security operation in the east. Persons fleeing Donbas due to abductions and intimidation may also refrain from registration in order to avoid revealing their whereabouts to the perpetrators. Some would like to register, but cannot do so because they lack the necessary documentation such as identity cards and health records due to disrupted services in the home region.

IDPs in Ukraine come predominantly from urban or semi-urban backgrounds. The vast majority of IDPs are women and children². Commonly, men stay at home to take care of family property. As breadwinners some men have stayed in the conflict area for work reasons. Men who would like to leave the conflict area may be prevented from doing so by armed groups. Another group of people who have often stayed in the home community are the elderly, who have either been unwilling, or in some cases unable to travel.

Legal framework

Ukraine lacks a legal framework on internal displacement. The first piece of legislation in this field, “Law on guaranteeing rights and freedoms of citizens and the legal regime on the temporary occupied territory of Ukraine” was adopted by Ukraine’s Parliament in mid-April. This law determines the rights of displaced persons from Crimea. Conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the consequently growing number of IDPs has necessitated a new law to cover IDPs from both eastern regions and Crimea. However, an IDP law passed by the Parliament on 19 June 2014 has become a subject of controversy. The main criticism concerned the process of registration, and the lack of stipulations on how to provide financial aid and compensation on lost property to IDPs. Following heavy criticism from civil society, the president of Ukraine vetoed the law on 16 July 2014. In response, the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament recommended that the Parliament would override the presidential veto. However, the presidential administration and the Ministry of Justice, with assistance from civil society groups and UNHCR are currently preparing a new draft law.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice has, since the beginning of July, been drafting a by-law on IDP registration. Establishing a nation-wide centralised registry of IDPs would alleviate many problems related to registration, some of which have been discussed above. Currently there are two types of registration: first, IDPs need to register with the Department of Social Protection in the host region to access social payments and services; and second, IDPs may need to register their temporary change of residence with the State Migration Services if they plan to purchase property or open a business. The by-law on registration depends on the passing of the law on IDPs.

Assistance to IDPs

² This holds true for internal displacement globally. Some 70% of all IDPs in the world are women and children, see: NRC and IDMC Briefing Paper of 7 March 2014. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/images/2014/201403-global-girl-disrupted-brief-en.jpg>

Assistance to IDPs in Ukraine has so far been provided by regional government authorities, civil society organizations and private donors. The central government has faced growing criticism due to limited funding allocations to IDPs. Many IDPs interviewed by the SMM also raised criticism towards what they perceived to be lack of interest by the central government in their difficult situation. Since late June the central government has taken a more active co-ordinating role by establishing governmental interagency co-ordination centres, both at the national and regional levels.

Regional and district governments establish in which sanatoriums or resorts there are available places, and assist them to find private housing. Some regional authorities, for example Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi and Kherson, provide cash assistance to newly arrived IDPs. Social service costs of IDPs are also covered from the social budgets of host regions, which will be increasingly difficult if IDP numbers continue to grow in the future and their displacement becomes protracted. Civil society organizations such as NGOs and churches also provide accommodation assistance, and they carry the main responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance like food and non-food items. Civil society organizations also assist IDPs to access government services. NGOs and churches are also helping people to leave their home regions by arranging transportation. The source of funding for civil society assistance is private donations. UN agencies and international organisations have so far provided some assistance to IDPs, such as hygiene kits and other non-food items, as well as medical and psychological services. Unsupportive legislation on humanitarian aid and insufficient data on IDPs hamper international aid efforts.

Views of IDPs on displacement

The following section of this report presents views presented by IDPs to SMM monitors during focus group discussions and individual interviews in thirteen Ukrainian regions. The subtitles reflect the topics that were discussed during the interviews. Some explanatory and contextualising information has been included from SMM interviews with Ukrainian government representatives, NGOs and international aid agencies.

Departure from home

The vast majority of persons who participated in the discussions had left their home regions in late May or in June 2014. IDPs from Crimea had left home earlier, in March or April. Elderly IDPs of Crimean Tatar origin stated that they left Crimea because taking Crimea under the effective control of Russia's government had revived memories of deportation during Soviet times. They also had more tangible fears that pushed them to leave: curtailed freedom of assembly, information about enforced disappearances, persecution of Tatars and political activists, and their personal experiences of armed men conducting searches in mosques and private houses had made life in Crimea perilous.

The vast majority of interviewees came from the most affected conflict areas in the eastern part of Ukraine (Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Horlivka, and Luhansk and Donetsk cities). Direct experience or the witnessing of acts of violence, such as killings, abductions, threats and

intimidation, as well as the perception by people that these acts of violence could affect also them personally, made them leave. The activity of armed gangs targeting the local population and, in general, a lack of rule of law were amongst key reasons. In June shelling and shootings became more frequent in the northern part of Donetsk. Many interviewed IDPs recalled particular incidents that had triggered them to leave. One woman said that she left on the day she found a corpse at her doorstep. Another person said that they fled their hometown Kramatorsk after witnessing the bombing of a five-story building that caused the death of one man and two teenage girls.

Fear for children's lives and their exposure to traumatising events and repeated nights spent in makeshift shelters due to fighting were major reasons for families to decide that at least part of the family had to leave for safety. Parents told the SMM that younger children particularly suffered from sleeping problems, and had become afraid of loud noises. Some children had become withdrawn and stopped talking. Others started playing war games and showed aggression.³ Many interviewed parents said, however, that time in a safe environment in other regions had made most symptoms disappear. Some reported that their children were still afraid of aircrafts and sharp noises that resemble shooting.

Another push factor for people to leave their homes was worsening living conditions. Water and electricity supply had become irregular, and in towns like Sloviansk stopped altogether, which made everyday life difficult. Banks and shops were closing down, and food prices had grown higher. Social payments were not paid any longer as civil services were not functioning. Work places were closed, or in some cases, destroyed.

Interviewees said that they had selected their destination based on having relatives or friends in a certain region. While people had often discussed the possibility of leaving beforehand, their accounts of departure revealed the degree of panic and hastiness. They took only the most important documents, some clothes and necessary medicines. Some said that they did not want to draw attention by carrying large luggage. They feared that armed groups might hinder them from leaving, or confiscate their unoccupied apartment.

Train travel was considered safer than road travel, as there were numerous checkpoints of both armed groups and Ukrainian armed forces along the main roads. Travel by train had mostly been uninterrupted for those who left in June or earlier. Challenges to train travel were the difficulties purchasing tickets for overcrowded trains at the railway stations. Some said that their friends or relatives elsewhere in the country had purchased online tickets for them. In July the Ukrainian Ministry of Transportation arranged extra train capacity from the eastern regions, but intensified fighting made it difficult to enter the train stations. According to information received from IDPs, leaving by train has also become more difficult as armed groups have started to sweep train stations and train carriages in search of adult men leaving the territories under their control. In some instances, adult men were pushed to join the armed groups. Reportedly adult men have also been used as forced labour to dig trenches or build barricades. On 28 July the trains ceased going to Luhansk due to fighting in the area and damage to railway infrastructure.

³ UNICEF's *Rapid Psychosocial Assessment of Children in Donetsk Oblast* confirms high levels of fear and anxiety amongst children in the conflict areas of Donetsk region. The assessment was conducted in May 2014. http://www.unicef.org/ukraine/Rapid_Psychosocial_Assesment_of_Children_in_Donetsk_Oblast.pdf

A number of volunteer organisations, such as a Protestant church in Sloviansk, arranged buses to evacuate people from conflict zone. Those travelling by road either in buses or private cars said that they had been stopped several times at the checkpoints where their documents, luggage and vehicles were screened. The screening of men was reportedly more meticulous than of women both at Ukrainian government and militant checkpoints. None of the interviewees stated that any person was detained or hindered. Nobody described any extortion at checkpoints.

With few exceptions, travelling had taken place without major incidents. At least two interviewees said that their car tires had been shot at, and others reported having items stolen. One family said that Chechen fighters had held them at a checkpoint for three hours and threatened to kill their families back home if they revealed the position of militant forces to Ukrainian military.

Not everyone willing to escape from the conflict area was able to leave. Several focus group discussions brought up the fact that only those who had sufficient financial means could do so, while others who could not afford the travel costs or temporary stay in other regions had no other option than to stay at home. Some had family members who were disabled or whose health condition did not allow travel. In such cases either the whole family, or some family members, stayed at home to take care of them.

The loss of control over Crimea by the Ukrainian government, and the armed conflict in Donbas, has led to disruptions in the social fabric in these places. Family members have become physically separated from each other due to the situation, as has been described above. Separation and fear for the lives of family members who stayed in the conflict area caused anxiety amongst many interviewees. Most said that they were still able to keep in touch with family members and friends at home via mobile phones or Skype. IDPs from the eastern regions also explained to the SMM that some of their family members or relatives had fled to Russia, because they had friends or relatives living there. Others chose Russia because their opinion about the conflict made them distrust the Ukrainian government, and were reluctant to move to other parts of the country.

Housing in the place of displacement

The government of Ukraine seems to have insufficiently responded to the housing needs of internally displaced persons. Only in late June was a web portal launched, through which persons wanting to leave conflict areas could browse through available accommodation facilities in potential host regions (www.migrants.gov.ua).⁴ The website is maintained by the Interagency Co-ordination HQ in Kyiv. A few recently arrived IDPs interviewed by the SMMU said that they had used the website to find accommodation, but most had arrived before the service was

⁴ On 16 July a State Emergency Services representative said that, nationally, almost five thousand premises had been identified that could accommodate up to 55,000 IDPs. Some civil society interlocutors told the SMM that not all premises listed on the website are in habitable condition, and some premises cannot be found at all. The Ministry for Regional Development has responded to criticism by tasking regional authorities to verify that the offered premises are in sufficient condition, have sanitation facilities and access to water and electricity. They are also mapping premises that are suitable for winter.

available. The most common methods to find housing were social networks (either web-based or personal), NGOs or through regional departments of social protection. Ordinary Ukrainians' willingness to help displaced families might be illustrated in the account of two women who had fled Luhansk with their children: during the train journey they had engaged in a conversation with travellers from western Ukraine who had offered them accommodation free of charge until the end of summer. Finding housing has been more problematic for Roma IDPs; interviewees from this group perceived that they did not receive necessary assistance from local state officials.

Housing conditions and costs vary greatly, depending on where arriving persons end up. Those currently in private accommodation were staying with relatives or friends, in flats or houses that had been offered to IDPs by local residents, and some in flats that they had rented themselves. Around two thirds of those interviewed who were staying in private accommodation did not pay rent, as many of them were staying in houses together with their relatives. Those who did pay rent were sometimes given a reduced rent price, but some others said that they had to pay high rental costs. Some of those staying with relatives said that they felt like an extra burden to the households, especially if they had no means to help cover housing costs.

Collective accommodation is provided to IDPs, either by regional administration or by private owners. These include sanatoriums, summer camp facilities, holiday resorts and hotels, student dormitories, monasteries or other types of communal buildings. Collective accommodation is by and large free of charge, at least for an initial stay. Amongst around thirty interviews (both groups and individuals) with people staying in collective accommodation, only three had to pay for it. Accommodation costs were covered either by regional or district authorities, by churches or private donors (businessmen, owners of hotels, NGOs). However, for example in the Kyiv region, some IDPs had been told that soon they would be expected to pay for utility costs, though no exact information about this had been made available.⁵ This illustrates a more common expectation that private agencies that have until now offered free accommodation to IDPs, are about to reach the limits of their available assets for the purpose.

So far, the Government's financial support for covering accommodation costs of IDPs has been limited to the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution no. 213 'On Guaranteeing Temporary Accommodation for Families Displaced from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and from the city of Sevastopol.'⁶ The resolution allocates UAH 25 million (EUR 1.42 million) from state budget reserve funds to compensate the costs of accommodation of displaced families of civilians and military servicemen from Crimea until 1 July 2014. The compensation will be paid to the accounts of institutions providing accommodation. This Resolution thus aims to compensate owners of sanatoriums and recreation institutions for past costs of accommodating IDPs rather than respond to any future needs of accommodation. The Resolution procedure also suggests that IDPs from Crimea staying in private accommodation will not receive compensation. Currently, there is no legal mechanism enabling the state to finance the accommodation of IDPs from the eastern regions.

⁵ Kyiv regional administration representatives informed the SMM on 23 July that electricity and gas companies were putting pressure on the regional administration and the owners of IDP accommodation facilities to pay accumulated debts or face supply cuts. The regional administration hopes that the central government will find a solution.

⁶ The text is available under <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/213-2014-%D0%BF>.

Generally, the interviewed IDPs were content with the quality of accommodation. Particularly, those staying in private housing were satisfied, though few worried about the costs of living in the long run. The level of sanatorium facilities varies widely: some have spacious, newly renovated rooms with private bathrooms while others are run-down establishments that have not been used for years. Some overcrowding was observed, and some complained about the lack of privacy. In some sanatoriums and dormitories there was only a limited number of sanitation facilities, that were often shared by men and women. Some facilities lack insulation and heating systems.⁷ If displacement continues after September, the lack of heating will be a major problem for many IDPs. An additional problem for those currently staying in student dormitories is that they will need to find another housing solution by the start of the study year in early September.

Socio-economic situation

None of the participants in the assessment reported serious problems with nutrition. Those staying in private housing buy and cook their own food, though some had received food aid from churches or NGOs. Collective housing often lacks kitchens for private use; instead, communal meals are prepared by volunteers several times a day. Less than a third of interviewees staying in collective accommodation, mostly in hotels or student dormitories, said they covered their own food costs. Donated food was sometimes lacking in fresh food items. Mothers with babies, in particular, mentioned that baby food had not been donated, meaning additional financial pressure.

Access to medical services varies. State health services for IDPs work well in some regions while in other places accessing health services is problematic. The majority of interviewees said that they had not needed medical services, and thus did not know whether they would be easily accessible. Hoping to return home soon, they had not made an effort to find out how the system worked. A few sanatoriums provide medical care, and some local doctors and nurses offer medical services to IDPs as voluntary work. But IDPs often need financial support to purchase the medicine, or to access specialised care. Those with chronic diseases and prescribed medicine had difficulties in renewing the prescriptions. Civil society actors are covering the gaps by covering medical costs and assisting IDPs to get access to hospital care.

Only few IDPs are employed in their place of displacement. For example, in Ivano-Frankivsk only two of 27 interviewed had found work, while the rest said they lived on savings, social benefits and support from families and local communities. Many were not in a position to take up regular employment due to their personal situation. These included women who are pregnant or have small children, pensioners and disabled persons. Location of displacement also affected work opportunities: IDPs staying in the city of Dnipropetrovsk had better chances finding work than those staying in the countryside. Some IDPs committed to do voluntary work helping other IDPs. In Kherson region some IDPs have found seasonal employment as daily workers in agriculture or selling food and souvenirs at the beach. The jobs that IDPs have been able to find are often not in the field of their previous work experience, and they receive far lower salaries than at home. An exception in interviews were IT experts that reportedly found work easily in

⁷ According to the UN's Weekly Situation Report on Emergency Shelter and NFI, period 23-30 July 2014, some 60 % of the buildings used as collective accommodation for IDPs are not suitable for winter accommodation.

the western Lviv region. Many Ukrainian regions also currently have high unemployment rates, and there is tough competition for jobs even for local residents.

IDPs had varying experiences in accessing social payments such as child benefits and pensions in the host region. While in principle there should be no obstacles to receiving social payments in other regions, in practice some displaced families had experienced bureaucratic problems related to documentation causing delays in payments, sometimes of months. Many interviewees expressed their frustration about laborious processes and lack of information from the state authorities on their status and rights. They also criticised the central state authorities for not preparing the necessary legal framework on displacement and for not allocating any budget funds to assist IDPs. At the same time, the IDPs were grateful for the hospitality and aid efforts of civil society groups and local residents to assist displaced persons in their difficult situation. In the absence of the Government's instructions some regions, e.g. Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi and Kherson, have decided to provide one-time cash assistance (UAH 200-1,000; EUR 11.38-57) to IDPs at the time of arrival.

Return home, and other durable solutions

The possibility of returning home appears different for displaced persons from Crimea and the eastern regions. The interviewed IDPs from Crimea are not expecting a fast solution to the Crimean question, and they are not willing to return to Crimea if it stays under the control of the Russian Federation. The given reasons for not returning included information regarding price increases and growing unemployment in Crimea, continuing political pressure, and fear of religious and ethnic discrimination, particularly among Crimean Tatars. Not expecting to return home soon, IDPs from Crimea aspired to integrate in the host region by finding sustainable sources of livelihood, affordable private housing, and educational opportunities for children. Crimean Tatar interlocutors were concerned that resettling Crimean Tatars in different regions in Ukraine would lead this minority group to lose its cohesion and unity.

Unlike IDPs from Crimea almost all displaced persons from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions stated that they wanted to return home. Families with children were hoping to return before the beginning of school year (1 September), though not all expected this to be feasible. A crucial pre-condition for returning home was the cessation of hostilities and an improved security situation. Other factors affecting return were the reconstruction of destroyed public infrastructure, private houses, and functioning public services. Many also raised a concern that the economic recovery of Donbas area would take years, and there might not be job opportunities for returnees. Concern that the above conditions would not be met was amongst the main reasons for those not planning to return. Some had relatives in the big cities of Ukraine or Russia and considered there were good opportunities to settle permanently in these places.

A number of interviewed IDPs raised their concerns over perceived emerging critical attitudes towards IDPs in the host communities. While in general people in the host regions were hospitable and generous, some negative voices, particularly towards male IDPs from the eastern regions, had started to be heard in July. At the same time the interviewees also raised their concerns over social tensions that may be awaiting them at home. Divided political views that preceded and contributed to the current conflict may have strengthened during the displacement

as part of communities fled to other parts of Ukraine and others to Russia or Crimea. Sometimes differing views have even affected family cohesion. Reconciliation processes are needed to enable the returnee communities to cohabit peacefully together and build back home towns and villages. Some members of minority groups such as Roma and Protestants were particularly concerned whether they would be able to return back home as the armed groups and their supporters had openly targeted them during the conflict. In general, the interviewees said that post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation processes will be essential for sustainable conflict resolution in eastern Ukraine.