

# Emergency in Ukraine: Ongoing Humanitarian and Health Response

March 2022



Four weeks after the intensification of the emergency in Ukraine, more than 3.6 million people have already fled violence in the country, and 6.5 million have been internally displaced according to UNHCR. This represents the biggest and fastest refugee flow in Europe since the Second World War. European countries have been incredibly welcoming towards these refugees by taking them in their territory and offering assistance. Ireland is expected to welcome up to 200,000 refugees in the coming months, and the Health Service Executive is responding by providing donations to Ukraine and coordinating health services.

The Irish Global Network hosted a live event with speakers from a number of humanitarian and development actors working on the ground in Ukraine to discuss how Irish organisations and the international community is responding and what plans were in place to safeguard the health and welfare of both refugees and the internally displaced into the future. Watch the event [here](#).

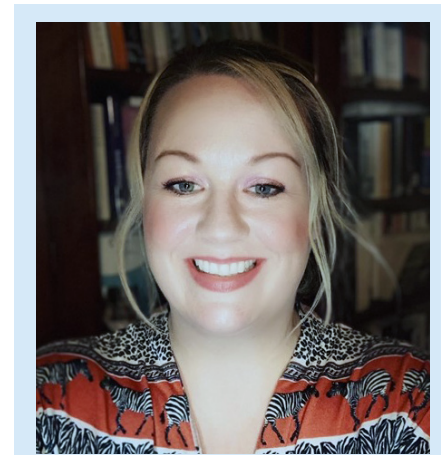
We examine the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and discuss how it has affected the population; the health consequences, needs and responses; the implications of human rights violations and violence against civilians and refugees; and the mental health needs of fleeing populations. Speakers from INGOs: **Amnesty International, GOAL, Americares, and the UN's international Organization for Migration** came together as part of a live web event on March 24, 2022. More than 70 live attendees participated in the event with a further 200 recorded views online. The event was moderated by Nadine Ferris France, *the Executive Director of Irish Global Health Network*.

## A SUMMARY OF THE KEY MESSAGES:

**Unarose Hogan** is *Senior Infectious Disease Advisor and Emergency Medical Responder* in Ukraine with Americares, a health-focused relief and development organization. She has spent the past seventeen years working in global health security, infection control, academia and clinical practice.

“There’s an overwhelming need for mental health and psychosocial support services, exacerbation of chronic mental health: PTSD, depression, anxiety, among other things. We anticipate we are going to see it in large volumes: this is also a priority area for Americares”.

- Non-communicable diseases and chronic disease pose an enormous challenge. During disaster, we often see increased transmission of infectious diseases due to destruction of water and sanitation, inadequate vaccination coverage, lack of access medicines, as well as movement of populations and crowding
- Early intervention of mental illnesses among the migrant and refugee groups can actually help prevent these conditions from becoming chronic and complex
- Prior to the Russian invasion Ukraine had already been battling with COVID-19. Conditions on the ground are an ideal environment for a COVID-19 resurgence. Ukraine has an adult population with 34% vaccinated, 10% boosted, and a pediatric vaccination campaign that began just weeks prior to the invasion - in other words, a largely unprotected population
- The need for urgent acute medical care to deal with injuries from the conflict is enormous. The conflict zones are mostly inaccessible to humanitarian aid and I anticipate we will see immense needs for trauma and injury support among the refugee population as this continues
- In terms of humanitarian response, the initial coordination and set up involved plugging into the health cluster headed by WHO, connecting with the offices for International coordination in Lviv and national authorities
- So far, Americares has delivered about four tons of relief and supplies into Ukraine, and they have another half a ton on the way.



Speakers from:



**Joe Lowry** is *Senior Media and Communication Officer* for the International Organization for Migration, the UN Migration Agency. He has over 20 years of experience and has worked both in journalism and as a Communications specialist in the humanitarian emergency and development sector.

“If 200,000 people come here, and if we see tens of thousands or more people being hosted by families in their homes, it’s very difficult to see how there’ll be a transition in the medium term into a new arrangement. It’s critically important that we start to build in a wider support structure.”

- The situation in the border is hard, people want to stay close to their home country. The flow of women refugees is very high, and they are vulnerable to trafficking and other harmful actions
- When we talk about protection in this humanitarian crisis the focus must be on the protection of the refugee convention, but overall protection from harm as well protecting people, because of the predominantly female refugee flow
- The best way to help in this situation is through donations



**Colm O’Gorman** is the *Executive Director for Amnesty International Ireland* since 2008. He was the founder and director of *One in Four*, the national organisation that supports victims of sexual violence. He is also a former member of Seanad Eireann, an author, and a regular media commentator on human rights and social justice issues.

“You know, you see it in their eyes, their clothes, their face: these are people who were out having a coffee a few days ago, or watching football with their mates, or playing football with their mates, or going shopping, or doing what people do in a European country. And then you see them queuing up in thousands, and obviously every single question going through their mind is about that happens next.”

- Amnesty has seen the use of indiscriminate weapons against civilians and attacks on protected targets have been recorded. There have been 64 attacks on health care facilities since the conflict started
- Ireland does not receive more than 800 people a year as part of its refugee resettlement program. The crisis in Ukraine has been met with an unprecedented flow of refugees into Ireland: 10,000 people have arrived in the country since the beginning of the crisis, and up to 200,000 people will arrive over the next months
- It is critically important to build a wider support structure around refugees and refugee families who are in hosted accommodation to ensure the sustainability of that kind of support
- More than half of Ukraine’s children have been displaced and about 1.8 million child refugees have left Poland. Trafficking of unaccompanied minors has been proven to be a problem in the middle of the crisis. The challenge is going to be at the national level to respond to this



**Cristian Ghilardi** is *Senior Humanitarian Advisor on GOAL’s Emergency Response Unit*. He has significant experience in humanitarian response with MSF in Kenya, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Yemen; and with Care International in Asia. He has worked as Health Integration Commissioning Manager for the NHS in England.

“Kindness has to continue, it’s in the media: it’s going to last for a while. We need to make sure that we support the Ukrainian people there, but also when they come to Ireland. We have to be kind and help them integrate because they might be here for a while. There are generations, mostly kids, that we need to make sure are welcomed and supported”.

- There are concerns in terms of protection not only when refugees are crossing the border, but also on temporary shelters or distribution centers
- GOAL is trying to support local structures and the civil society response to enhance its intervention and relief
- Amid this crisis, the COVID-19 massive global crisis must not be forgotten. Inequality in access to vaccines and therapeutics is killing hundreds of thousands of people. Vaccination of refugees to prevent the spread of COVID-19 must be a priority too

