

GAPS briefing on the conflict in Ukraine

As we witness the devastating developments in Ukraine following the Russian invasion, and what that means for women and girls there, the UK Government has a responsibility to show its leadership and reaffirm its commitments to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to the rights of women and girls in Ukraine and elsewhere by taking urgent and effective decisions and actions that put women and girls at the centre of its response and meaningfully include their participation at all levels.

It is crucial that the UK Government commits to gender-sensitive response to address the immediate needs and concerns of women and girls who will be disproportionately impacted by this conflict and at further risk of gendered violence.

We recommend that the UK Government and the international community fully considers the following five priorities as they respond to the Ukraine conflict:

1. Provide Financial Support to Women's Rights Organisations:

- a) Consult with in-country women's rights organisations (WROs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) and networks, including girl-centred and youth-led organisations, who are already engaging in crisis response to identify and respond to their needs. Include them in programmes as partners and experts, from design to implementation, as they understand the context in-depth and are best placed to continue providing services and undertaking activities¹.
- b) Guarantee direct, flexible and core funding to WROs and CSOs working for gender equality to support them to continue leading on ensuring women's rights as per their self-identified agenda.
- c) Guarantee that humanitarian aid/funding will reach WROs directly to ensure they can continue working in support of women and girls who are at risk of increased violence.

2. Strengthen Women Participation:

- a) Ensure consultation with WROs and CSOs at all stages to guarantee women and girls' participation in all aspects of decision-making of interventions.
- b) Guarantee the inclusion of women's organisations and leaders from diverse backgrounds in any negotiations and delegations from the start, including advancing their full participation in Track I and Track II negotiations, including at decision-making levels.

¹ We welcome the recent bid by CSSF focusing on Ukrainian WROs and Women, Peace and Security, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-bids-supporting-women-peace-and-security-in-ukraine-under-the-conflict-security-and-stability-fund-programme-2022-23--2>

3. Embed Gender-Analysis in all Crisis Response:

- a) Conduct rapid gender analysis across all sectors of any intervention to understand the different needs and priorities for women and girls across Ukraine and respond to these needs effectively by working with WROs and CSOs.
- b) Have dedicated gender advisors in any humanitarian or military response to ensure that all humanitarian and military crisis response policy is rooted in a gender-sensitive conflict analysis.

4. Provide Safety for Everyone Fleeing:

- a) Waive all visa requirements for people living in Ukraine who are forced or decide to flee, including Ukrainian nationals but also people from other nationalities.
- b) Guarantee that all refugees in bordering countries are treated fairly and humanely, and can access humanitarian aid freely, regardless of their nationality, gender identity and sexual orientation or race
- c) Provide safe and legal routes for refugees claiming asylum in the UK and ensure their safety and dignity when they arrive in the UK, providing them with legal and psycho-social assistance, as well as dignified accommodation and other services identified by asylum seekers, including SHRH.

5. Act now to prevent and respond to gender-based violence

- a) The risk of gender-based violence (GBV) is increasing for women and girls within Ukraine and those on the move. It is vital that the response to this crisis includes GBV prevention and response services. Local responders must be supported and, as necessary to meet need, GBV experts deployed now to ensure protection needs are correctly assessed and context appropriate services, for example services such as women and girl safe spaces and case management, are put in place.
- b) GBV risk mitigation must be implemented across sectors, to ensure zero tolerance for sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of women and girls, with training, complaints mechanisms, and accountability prioritized.
- c) Ensure that the full spectrum of lifesaving services - including GBV and SRHR services - are provided - from the start of the emergency response, in line with the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP). These services should be inclusive and accessible, including to adolescent girls and in remote areas.
- d) Provide strong political and financial support to international justice mechanisms including the International Criminal Court and the UN Human Rights Council newly created independent international commission of inquiry for Ukraine to ensure suspected perpetrators of crimes under international law including gender-based violence, are brought to justice.