

UKRAINE

Bridging humanitarian response

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a wide range of responders, both established organisations and first-time relief providers, have emerged to address the growing needs. At the national level, the Government of Ukraine (GoU) is attempting to centralise the reception and coordination of aid. At the oblast and local levels, the GoU, Oblast Military Administrations (OMAs), and hromadas (municipalities), alongside national and local NGOs and the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, have been distributing and providing aid to the affected population. With the networks and connections they have previously built, especially with public administrations, national NGOs present prior to the 2022 invasion may have considerable capacity to engage in the response. Insecurity has disrupted the activities of some of those NGOs, however, and led their staff to evacuate, particularly in the conflict-affected areas.

At the same time, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based networks, and a considerable amount of newly emerged volunteers and volunteer networks are providing vital humanitarian response, particularly at the local level. While their capacity may be limited, they are more agile in their ability to reach the affected population even in the most hazardous areas and may have a better understanding of local needs. Civil society sees their contributions to the humanitarian response as a way of participating in the national effort.

The international response, consisting of UN agencies and INGOs, considerably scaled up its presence since February, but a strong national response with its own coordination, processing, and delivery procedures characterises the environment it operates in. Population displacement, conflict dynamics, and differing local implementations of national directives mean that international organisations juggle supporting government entities, operating with established humanitarian responders, and establishing new relationships with more fluid ad hoc networks.

The multitude of different responders involved at the local level, both new and established, has led to a number of issues, including parallel structures and a lack of respective understanding of how different levels of response are working to address needs. The ways in which the response operates (in terms of the coordination and delivery of assistance) considerably vary by oblast and even hromada. It has been impossible to quantify the impact and reach of the response of local formal and informal organisations, networks, and volunteers.

These challenges make it difficult for local and international responders to effectively work together and create cohesion between the different levels of response. Regardless of the challenges, the GoU, NGOs, the international humanitarian system, and informal structures all play an important role in the response, demonstrating a need to enhance relationships, collaboration, and information-sharing between local and international levels of response.

About this report

Aim: the product aims to inform international humanitarian responders about the national and local systems and the local response within Ukraine.

Methodology: the report relies on the secondary data review of public and non-public sources and 77 key informant interviews.

Limitations: there is limited information on the scope of the local humanitarian response in Ukraine. The multitude of responders involved at a local level makes it difficult to build a comprehensive picture of the response. A lack of telecommunications in some areas makes it hard to reach local responders for key informant interviews.

UKRAINE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

Since the last administrative reform in 2020, Ukraine has been divided into three main levels:

24

OBLASTS
(REGIONS)

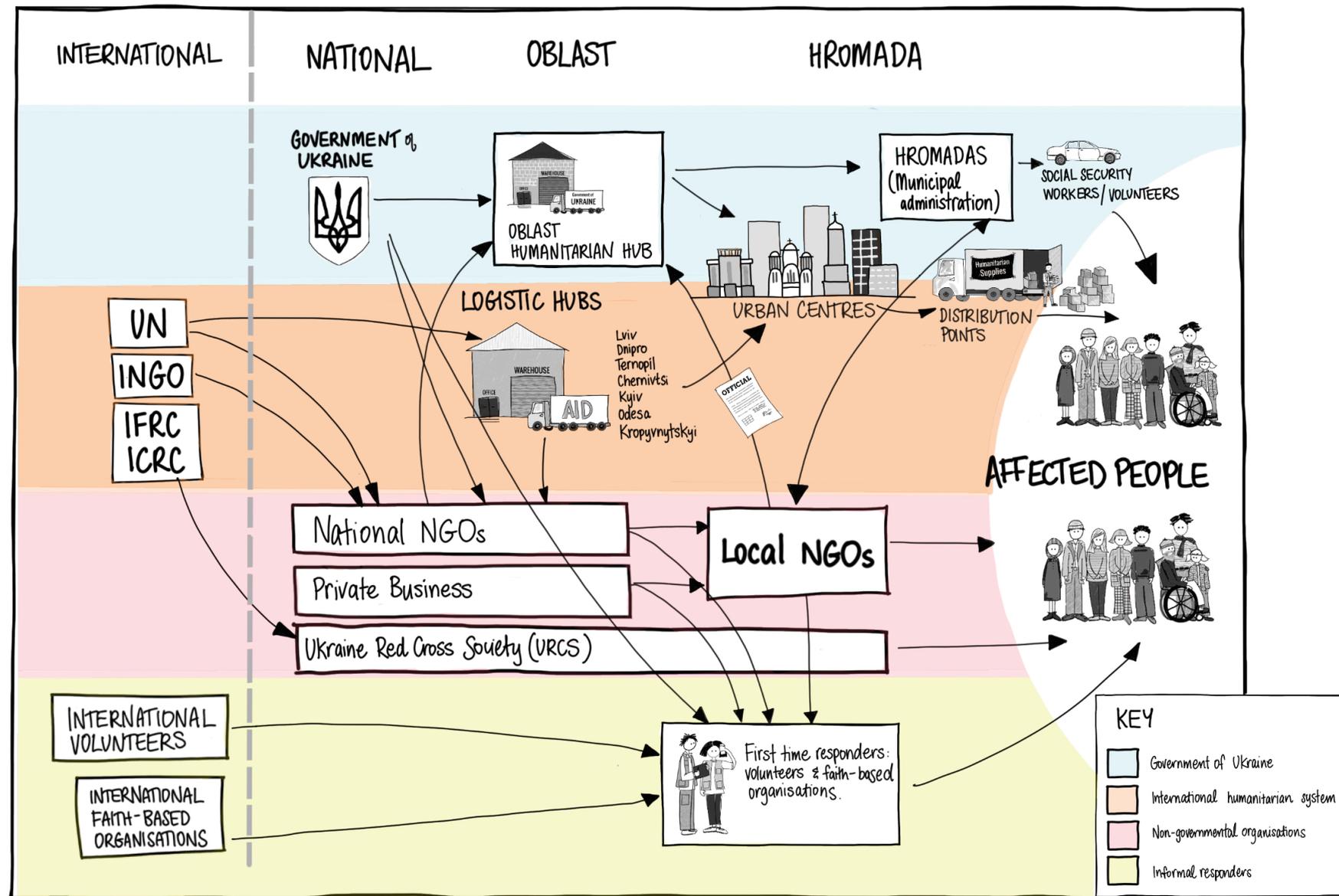
136

RAIONS
(DISTRICTS)

1,469

HROMADAS
(MUNICIPALITIES)

Complex dynamics of aid delivery in Ukraine



Source: ACAPS.

Disclaimer: It is not possible to display every connection between the different humanitarian responders in Ukraine.

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KEY FINDINGS

Many different coordination structures exist at all levels of response, although some responders – particularly volunteers – operate independently. The existence of many coordination structures poses specific challenges when it comes to the prioritisation and duplication of efforts (KII 14/04/2022 a). In some areas, all the responders involved in the response at the local level coordinate and work together with oblast authorities to address needs. In others, the response is much more fragmented, and multiple parallel coordination structures exist (KII 04/04/2022 e; KII 04/04/2022 c; KII 04/05/2022 d). The local networks typically act as a distribution channel for regional administrators. Depending on the location, these networks can be extremely effective (KII 29/04/2022a; KII 04/04/2022 b; KII 04/04/2022 a).

National and local responders exchange information and sometimes coordinate efforts, but there is a lack of coordination between local and international responders (CF SSS 15/04/2022). There are a number of first-time responders and local NGOs who find it challenging to connect and build partnerships and struggle to integrate more within coordination structures. Coordination at the local level is organic and based on networks and personal connections (KII 03/05/2022 a). Information on people's needs obtained from local responders, such as volunteers, would be a valuable source for bigger organisations (KII 25/04/2022 a).

Bureaucracy, language barriers, and a lack of capacity hinder national and local NGOs from plugging into the international system. Overall, there is a disconnect between the international humanitarian system and local responders, including local NGOs and first-time relief providers (such as volunteers), despite the willingness of responders to connect. Those without experience in humanitarian response are likely unfamiliar with standard reporting practices, international coordination structures, and humanitarian principles, which enhances the disconnection. National and local NGOs flag the need for financial support to retain staff and continue their activities (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022). The lack of stronger synergies

between the local, national, and international levels hampers the sharing and coordination of information (KII 05/05/2022 a; NP 06/05/2022; KII 11/04/2022 a).

There is a huge diversity in how each oblast organises its distribution systems depending on the intensity of conflict, the needs they are addressing, and available resources. Differences in bureaucratic procedures and interpretation of government directives from oblast to oblast can be confusing, especially for international organisations who are new or expanding the scope of their operations in the country. In most cases, oblast administrations and responders heavily rely on informal networks and previous contacts, and it is challenging for international responders to connect to those networks (CF SSS 15/04/2022).

Social networks, especially personal contacts, have been essential to the response at the local level. Social media, including Viber, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and even the websites of authorities, have been effective for exchanging information (KII 06/04/2022 b; KII 04/04/2022 d; KII 19/04/2022 a; KII 04/04/2022 e; CF SSS 03/05/2022). Responders have also used these platforms to inform affected communities about the details of assistance delivery. At the oblast level, responders quickly share information through informal social networks, meaning coordination relies on previously established relationships (CF SSS 13/05/2022; KII 03/05/2022 a). The use of social networks for coordination poses an information management challenge as information is not shared in a standardised format. Communication of aid availability via social networks poses a risk of exclusion for populations that have less access to technology, particularly older people who are the population that is most likely to have remained in remote and conflict-affected areas.

Informal networks, including local volunteers, play a crucial role in aid delivery – particularly to remote and conflict-affected communities and ensuring that their needs are communicated. Challenges include quantifying the impact of the volunteer response, ensuring sustainability when volunteers become burnt out or lack resources and capacities to continue, and connecting the local volunteer networks to the international response to facilitate coordination and information sharing.

Outlook

As the conflict becomes protracted, new humanitarian developments must be considered.

Local informal response capacity will likely decrease as volunteers begin facing burnout, have to return to their previous occupations, or accept paid positions with large national NGOs or international organisations to meet livelihood needs. The economic impact of the war is also likely to spread, increase unemployment, and reduce or delay salaries. As a result, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance will likely continue increasing and include non-displaced populations in non-conflict-affected areas.

As stocks run out, in-kind assistance from the local private sector is also likely to decrease. The GoU and international responders will continue to replenish stocks through international aid channels, while informal responders will likely face increasing challenges in locally accessing commodities. The proportion of aid coming from the GoU and the international humanitarian sector compared to that from local businesses will increase over time. Problems in coordinating with international organisations will make it difficult for local networks to access this supply, likely creating gaps at the local response level.

Challenges affecting the capacity of local responders will likely affect the assistance levels, particularly in remote or conflict-affected areas, where they play a crucial role in delivery. If the challenges that local NGOs and volunteers face in connecting with the international humanitarian system persist, there is a risk of missing valuable opportunities to implement localised solutions, strengthen local capacities, and tap into local networks to allow for a more in-depth understanding of local dynamics and needs.

The GoU has shown its willingness to centralise the control of humanitarian aid (including foreign) as much as possible. While the approach can be effective at increasing efficiency and minimising duplication, the capacity of the Government to expand its responsibilities and respond to all humanitarian needs will be a challenge. Alternative aid distribution networks at both local and international response levels will continue to play an important role in ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches affected people.

The political landscape in Ukraine remains complex, despite current solidarity and consensus on the governance of the crisis. Differences in political agenda between the Government and the opposition are likely to resurface and influence humanitarian operations and relationships between the Government, local authorities, and non-governmental and informal sectors in the response (KII 18/04/2022 a; KII 22/04/2022 b). In recent years, Ukraine has experienced a series of political reforms alongside endemic issues, such as corruption and attacks against journalists, civil society activists, and members of minority groups. The police and judiciary response to those issues has often been inadequate, with the politicisation of courts further compounding the problem (Freedom House accessed 24/05/2022 a).

Violations of human rights and civil liberties are expected in areas under Russian control, severely limiting the access of both local and international responders. In Donbas, before February 2022, political rights and civil liberties were already strictly constrained, with no opposition, free and independent media, or NGOs allowed to operate. People loyal to the separatist leadership dominated local media, education facilities, and public services, and there were reports of social media users facing arrest for the criticism of authorities (Freedom House accessed 24/05/2022 b).

COORDINATION OF AID BY NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Since the beginning of the conflict, there has been a strong engagement from all levels of the GoU to provide humanitarian aid. Public institutions have remained functional in most areas of the country (KII 22/04/2022 b). Designated governmental bodies channel and then distribute foreign humanitarian aid coming into Ukraine to public institutions (social security services), NGOs, faith-based organisations, and OMAs. OMAs receive around 18% of centralised aid from the GoU, which they then supply to the hromadas that use local social workers or volunteers to reach the affected populations at the local level (President of Ukraine 04/05/2022). While understandable in theory, this supply system varies from oblast to oblast.

The Government of Ukraine

The Coordination Headquarters for Humanitarian and Social Affairs, a new government entity to address the increased humanitarian needs, was created on 2 March 2022. Its goal is to coordinate aid from foreign governments, international organisations, and large businesses and to channel it through OMAs, hromadas, and other national and local responders (such as faith-based organisations or NGOs) to reach the people in need of humanitarian assistance (President of Ukraine 02/03/2022 and 04/05/2022).

With this new system, the GoU established a structure organising the importation and distribution of humanitarian aid across the country. This aid largely goes through international humanitarian hubs (in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden), from where it undergoes further processing towards Ukraine (President of Ukraine accessed 21/04/2022).

When the humanitarian aid reaches the country, the aid centralised by the Government is handed over to the ministries or the Coordination Headquarters. Once sorted, they send the aid to the regional humanitarian hubs established in each oblast within the OMAs (President of Ukraine 04/05/2022). On 4 May, the GoU implemented an electronic customs clearance system to facilitate and speed up the import of goods at customs locations (Babel 04/05/2022).

The GoU has also increased its online presence to respond to the humanitarian crisis. It has established a centralised web page (<https://help.gov.ua/en>) to facilitate the process of aid shipment and has maintained an active presence on social media.

One example of online government services is the **Diia mobile application**. Created in 2020 as a digital portal for interacting with the Government, this state portal allows users to store electronic copies of official documents and remotely receive public services, such as official documents, social services, and official registrations. The app has more than 16 million users. At the beginning of the conflict, Diia expanded the scope of its services, particularly those focused on financial aid from the Government. As at March, all IDPs fleeing from areas of active conflict could request cash-based assistance through the app. Those who had lost their source of income because of the conflict could also request one-time compensation. Diia also allows users to process their claims of damaged or destroyed houses and donate to the Ukrainian army (Ukrinform 27/04/2022; and 22/04/2022).

Regional humanitarian hubs in OMA

At the beginning of the invasion, the GoU implemented changes at the oblast level. On 24 February, the Oblast State Administrations became OMA. To assess needs, coordinate the response, and distribute aid, all 24 OMA in the country established humanitarian hubs within their regions. As at May, these hubs were receiving 18% of all humanitarian assistance crossing the border into Ukraine. The rest goes to other public institutions, NGOs, and faith-based organisations (President of Ukraine 04/05/2022).

The humanitarian hubs cover a wide range of activities depending on the severity of hostilities. They aim to coordinate the collection and distribution of humanitarian assistance within their oblast, oversee safety and security, facilitate transport logistics and humanitarian corridors, and provide support to IDPs (President of Ukraine accessed 21/04/2022; DRC 08/04/2022; KII 14/04/2022 a). The humanitarian hubs coordinate with ministries, other government institutions, and other OMA to distribute the aid to the oblasts that experience the most severe needs (DRC 08/04/2022).

In the early stages of the conflict, there was a heavy reliance on NGOs and first-time relief responders, such as volunteers, instead of government centralisation of aid delivery (KII 22/03/2022 a). The direct coordination and distribution of aid from OMA to NGOs was at its strongest until early April. Since then, many OMA have started to channel aid distribution via formal public services, such as the social security administration (KII 29/04/2022 a; CF SSS 15/04/2022).

From the humanitarian hubs, different responders can coordinate aid delivery (CF SSS 15/04/2022; KII 22/03/2022 g):

- to aid provision centres within the main cities in each oblast
- to the hromadas upon request; municipal administrations use their local public social security services to reach those in need
- to NGOs or volunteers who can provide an official letter with the signature of local authorities listing the main needs of the population they are assisting.

Some oblast authorities in areas more directly affected by active fighting amass their own strategic resources, not distributing all the aid received and keeping strategic reserves in case of conflict escalation (KII 29/04/2022 a).

The supply chain also faces other challenges, such as a lack of capacity, mainly in terms of volunteer numbers and the means of transport at local social services (that OMA use for aid delivery), and a lack of access, making it harder to deliver aid to every region in the country (CF SSS 15/04/2022).

Mykolaiv oblast: the humanitarian response is mostly centred around Mykolaiv city, with only a few responders providing aid to the eastern part of the oblast where needs are higher. Locally headquartered NGOs along with local politicians and the OMA organise aid distribution. The majority of aid delivery is via government supply chains, with some distribution through volunteer networks. Poor logistics, the limited human and organisational capacity of local responders, limited fuel, active fighting, the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), and Ukrainian and Russian checkpoints constrain aid delivery (KII 10/04/2022). The regional government also provides shelter and organises escorts to the border or to western Ukraine (Mykolaiv Regional Council 25/04/2022).

Hromadas (municipalities)

Hromadas also play a significant role in the response, mainly through information sharing and aid collection and distribution. They regularly collect information about the needs of their population and share it with oblast authorities, NGOs, and the different ministries. Mayors head these administrations and act as key communicators. They are often the ones informing about the current situation in their city and the availability of humanitarian aid and corridors for evacuations. They coordinate their actions with the heads of military administrations in their municipalities.

People in villages or rural areas with limited access to mobile phone channels can communicate their needs and receive information on aid through their hromada. The Hromada Administration collects the information of people in need of assistance and sends the list to oblast authorities or other organisations (either state or international ones). In turn, these entities send the requested aid to the municipality. Once the hromada obtains the aid, local social workers, who are part of social security services, bring it to the people in need. Their knowledge of the community and prior participation in social assistance projects allow them to reach people in rural areas or people that cannot easily access other distribution points (such as people with disabilities, elderly people, and people without access to telecommunications) (CF SSS 13/05/2022).

In each hromada, local authorities have established their own humanitarian headquarters. In larger hromadas, social security services support the headquarters by working with aid providers, coordinating the warehouses and shelters, and distributing the aid. In smaller municipalities with fewer public services, hromadas are partnering with volunteer initiatives, helping with the organisation of their work, or asking for their support in aid distribution to affected populations based on their local knowledge of needs (KII 06/05/2022 a).

As with oblast authorities, there are also wide differences in how hromadas conduct their work as their capacities rely heavily on available human resources. Some of them have a designated person in charge of reporting the needs of the population and finding aid suppliers. For example, the Lviv municipal administration is quite proactive in its needs assessment and is able to present multiple requests weekly to their oblast. Others do not have the resources to do the work or ask for aid. In certain cases, hromadas do not want to share their information or prefer not to work with organisations with whom they have not had a previous relationship with, leaving response gaps and unmet needs and missing collaboration opportunities with local and international NGOs (CF SSS 13/05/2022).

Response constraints

Lack of capacity: humanitarian hubs run by OMAs report an important capacity gap in human resources, from lawyers to volunteers, cargo drivers, psychologists, and engineers (DRC 08/04/2022). A lack of office equipment (such as personal computers or laptops, security programmes, and tablets), data processing standardisation, and common databases for needs also limit their capacity (KII 21/03/2022 b; KII 22/03/2022 f)

Corruption: volunteers and local organisations have stated that in some cases, authorities try to centralise humanitarian aid under their control, increasing corruption risks (Transparency International accessed 04/05/2022; KII 28/04/2022 a; KII 25/03/2022 a).

Targeted population: Ukrainian administrations prioritise and target people based on their status (female IDPs, people with disabilities, women with children) and lack time and resources to understand the actual situation and needs of the population. In some cases, authorities will not check whether targeted people have already received aid or not, creating a risk for duplications or gaps (CF SSS 13/05/2022).

The presence of diplomats and high-level humanitarian workers has made **Lviv oblast** critical to humanitarian coordination. Lviv city is also the city with the highest presence of international responders and hosts a large number of IDPs, and the oblast has higher security presence and more supply facilities. The OMA brings in aid to their humanitarian hubs. This aid pipeline often does not reach people in more secluded areas, however, as the delivery happens mostly through centralised aid provision centres in major cities. Those in rural areas must rely on local NGOs and volunteers (CF SSS 15/04/2022).

UKRAINIAN NGO RESPONSE

The non-governmental sector in Ukraine has played an important role in the humanitarian response in the country. Ukraine had a strong NGO sector prior to February 2022, including a multitude of organisations with varying capacities and activities. Many of these NGOs did not focus on humanitarian concerns but delved into civic, development, or environmental issues.

The majority of the organisations surveyed in March reported that the provision of humanitarian aid for the conflict-affected population had become one of their areas of work since February. Other reported activities focused on information sharing, the provision of shelters and refugee assistance, the coordination of volunteer movements, and the organisation of humanitarian logistics, evacuation, and assessment. Around half of the surveyed organisations also reported collecting resources for the army (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022). This poses potential barriers in connecting with the international humanitarian system, due to the adherence to humanitarian principles.

Ukrainian NGOs can have a national, regional, or local scope based on the territory that their activities cover. Ukrainian NGOs act both independently and in partnership with national and local authorities or international and local NGOs. As a result, formal coordination mechanisms may not track some Ukrainian NGO activities, particularly in the case of local organisations.

NGOs usually collect information on needs through direct request from the affected population (social media, hotlines, in-person interactions), by collecting information from authorities or other organisations, by contacting people on their beneficiary database or by observing social media interactions (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022).

National NGOs

National and regional NGOs usually have presence in more than one oblast. They typically bring in humanitarian aid in big volumes and distribute it within the bigger cities with strong logistics that support aid management and distribution (KII 05/05/2022 a; CF SSS 03/05/2022). On average, national and regional NGOs have enough financial resources and capacity to move and distribute aid (CF SSS 03/05/2022). In some cases, they also directly deliver aid to hromadas, including rural ones and those in the east, although they are cautious about working in immediate proximity to the front line as it means excessive risk to their personnel (CF SSS 15/04/2022; KII 22/04/2022 b).

Some national NGOs, especially Proliska, aid in the evacuation of civilians from areas of conflict (KII 29/04/2022 a). Caritas, a faith-based network of organisations, is coordinated by a national office, but works at the local level within their dioceses to deliver assistance (KII 25/04/2022 a).

Larger NGOs established prior to the Russian invasion typically have their own coordination systems, sometimes in conjunction with the international system or within larger networks (KII 14/04/2022 a). They normally have an established protocol of activities and connections with officials in the public sector, UN agencies, and international donors; this enhances their international exposure and increases their reliability for new international partnerships (KII 05/05/2022 a; KII 29/04/2022 a; KII 20/04/2022 c; KII 05/04/2022 a). This may increase their capacity to manage large volumes of relief or funding. Smaller national NGOs may not have the same capacities, but they usually have expertise in working with specific population groups and well-established knowledge of their respective communities.

As not all NGOs operate within the same systems or networks, not all NGO response in Ukraine is tracked or included in monitoring (KII 20/04/2022 c). Currently, cooperation between NGOs is established between most of the responders that worked together before the conflict, some of whom work remotely as they have left their region or Ukraine (KII 06/04/2022 b). National and regional NGOs are involved in the work of humanitarian hubs established by the Government at both central and local levels. Their role is to identify needs and coordinate and deliver humanitarian aid.

Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS): since the start of the conflict, the URCS has delivered over 5,400 metric tonnes of humanitarian aid, the majority in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhzhia (URCS accessed 11/05/2022). The organisation has national, regional, and local branches throughout the country that provide humanitarian aid (URCS accessed 11/05/2022). Storage in warehouses and distribution are well organised, and they have provided evacuations, medical supplies to hospitals, and food to affected populations (KII 22/03/2022 b; KII 07/04/2022 b). Coordination takes place vertically within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and horizontally with the responders and community stakeholders (KII 22/03/2022 b). URCS communicates directly with municipalities, as well as organisations and institutions participating in the humanitarian response (KII 22/03/2022 b; KII 22/03/2022 b; KII 04/05/2022 a).

In some locations of **Zaporizhzhia oblast**, NGOs have developed systems to track and understand their impact and assess needs. These systems include a request processing and customer relationship management system in their warehouses. They analyse their expenditures and requests for items weekly and then use that data to inform their next replenishment. Externally, they share the information with other volunteer headquarters and the city department addressing IDP support (KII 19/04/2022 b).

Local NGOs

Local NGOs typically only had activities in one oblast or hromada before February 2022, although since then, a number of them have expanded their presence to multiple oblasts (KII 05/05/2022 b.; Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022). Local NGOs are often the main responders able to access remote and conflict-affected hromadas. They have good knowledge of local specificities and have better access, but they may not have the capacities of larger NGOs, including when it comes to financial management (CF SSS 03/05/2022). In some cases, they receive assistance from local authorities and collect information on needs (KII 04/04/2022 d).

In larger cities, local organisations report challenges cooperating with international aid organisations given high levels of bureaucracy, increasing the disconnect between the international response and local responders and potentially creating missed opportunities in better reaching people in conflict-affected areas (KII 04/04/2022 b). As local NGOs typically lack international partnerships, they fill the gaps with the OMAs, their own pipelines, or by partnering with national NGOs or other local NGOs (KII 05/05/2022 a).

Response constraints

Lack of experience in humanitarian activities and coordination: many NGOs have shifted the scope of their activities to answer to the humanitarian crisis. They have moved to carrying out activities not directly mandated by their statutes, forcing them to adapt to new contexts and responsibilities.

Capacity: more than a third of Ukrainian NGOs surveyed in March indicated that since February 2022 they require financial support to retain staff and continue their activities (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022). The Russian invasion may have displaced organisations established prior to the conflict from their area of operation, cutting off vital connections

to their networks (KII 11/04/2022 a). There is an outflow of NGO staff because of personal security considerations and burnout. The scaling up of Ukrainian operations by international organisations and institutions is also taking staff away from national NGOs (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022; KII 04/05/2022 b; KII 05/05/2022 b).

INFORMAL RESPONSE

In addition to the assistance channelled via the Government and NGOs, much assistance (which goes largely unreported) comes from other networks, groups, and individuals not specialised in humanitarian delivery. Such assistance appears to be widespread and able to reach areas inaccessible to the rest of the humanitarian community. The ability of volunteers to reach affected people in areas with constrained access has put local aid groups and volunteers at the centre of the response. Volunteers who deliver assistance, such as medicines and food, are usually small in capacity and transport aid by private cars and buses (CF SSS 15/04/2022; KII 08/04/2022 a). Independent volunteers have also supported the transportation of civilians via local buses, including in Zaporizhzhia (KII 04/04/2022 c).

First-time responders include CSOs that may have had a different focus pre-conflict and have switched to providing humanitarian aid (KII 11/04/2022 a). At the same time, there are a number of newly emerging responders, including international volunteers, private businesses, and volunteer groups, which have varying degrees of capacities, resources, and mandates; they may not have the capacity to partner with larger organisations (KII 22/04/2022 b; KII 20/04/2022 b). Those who have a strong pre-existing network of contacts are the ones who tend to create these newly formed organisations (CF SSS 03/05/2022).

The use of private vehicles to bring aid into Ukraine for distribution to the people in need is widespread among volunteers. Transport operates in a two-way process, with humanitarian aid going towards affected areas and civilians being evacuated in the other direction, particularly when the transport of goods is via passenger vehicles (KII 04/05/2022 a).

International volunteers

International volunteer efforts: Volunteer efforts to bring aid into Ukraine operate outside of traditional humanitarian channels. The communication of needs happens via contact with volunteers present in Ukraine. International volunteers drive aid into Ukraine and then transfer it to local volunteers, who deliver it to the people in need. This ad hoc assistance is particularly useful in assisting people that traditional aid responders do not reach. One challenge, though, is that smaller volunteer efforts are more susceptible to diversion by border officials because they may be unaware of proper procedures (KII 04/05/2022 a).

International faith-based groups: international faith-based groups and communities have mobilised to raise funds, provide assistance, and evacuate civilians. Depending on the organisations, they may focus these efforts on their community or the wider population. Faith-based organisations have played varying roles in the international response. Some groups travel in private vehicles to Ukraine to deliver aid and evacuate refugees. Some respond to the specific needs of their Ukrainian community while others establish larger operations (USIP 30/03/2022; TOI 10/03/2022; KII 04/05/2022A).

In-country volunteers and first-time relief responders

Independent volunteers: volunteers, who are often not linked to any organisation and work independently, are essential to the response, particularly in areas of conflict and Russian-controlled areas. They have limited capacities but are sometimes able to reach areas where other responders are not present or barred by access constraints (CF SSS 15/04/2022; TNH 10/03/2022). They usually have a strong understanding of the local area and the needs of the population because they often are members of the same community they are supporting (KII 08/04/2022 a; KII 04/04/2022 d; KII 05/04/2022 b). In some oblasts and cities, authorities have requested help from volunteers (KII 04/04/2022 d). In other instances, local volunteers have worked completely independently, without communication with authorities or other local groups (KII 05/04/2022 b).

Oblasts only provide aid to volunteers if they can present a formal request from an institution or organisation, meaning there is a risk for independent volunteers of exclusion from access to the official response supply structures (KII 29/04/2022 a).

In **Luhansk oblast**, heavy shelling and active insecurity make it harder for humanitarian supplies to reach the affected population. In this case, independent local volunteers play a crucial role, bringing aid in smaller amounts with their own cars and buses to areas inaccessible to bigger responders (CF SSS 15/04/2022).

Volunteer groups: some volunteers self-organise and form groups to enhance the response capacity, such as by conducting sewage management in areas without electricity, clearing debris from shelling, and providing free food from collective kitchens for those in need (KII 03/05/2022 a; KII 07/04/2022 ; Kharkiv City Council 07/04/2022; KII 05/04/2022B; KII 04/04/2022 a). Volunteer networks share information through social media and social groups, and collect aid from individual people, oblasts through the form of a letter, or private businesses (KII 05/04/2022 b; KII 28/04/2022; KII 05/04/2022 a). In some cities, such as Zaporizhzhia, volunteers

have established their own headquarters with different areas of focus of assistance (KII 19/04/2022 b). Volunteer groups are a major part of the response in the protection sector, including by supporting unaccompanied minors, providing sexual and gender-based violence services, and assisting people with disabilities and the elderly (NP 06/05/2022).

Faith-based networks: churches and the clergy often locally respond to the needs in their areas via aid coordination or distribution (KII 05/04/2022 b). In many cases, churches and parishes have established trust and are in close contact with the community and municipal administrations, equipping them better to understand the needs of the populations (KII 25/04/2022 a). There are many faith-based organisations bringing aid into Ukraine from other countries, including Poland (KII 04/05/2022 a; KII 22/04/2022 b). In many cases, the coordination of this aid takes place among networks of churches and local priests to aid people in conflict-affected areas, although challenges, such as a lack of vehicles to transport goods, exist (KII 04/05/2022 a).

Philanthropists and private businesses: local businesses an important role in supporting local communities. Private companies support the provision of supplies through their own networks (KII 04/04/2022 b). In conflict-affected areas, some entrepreneurs provide goods or repair critical infrastructure (KII 04/04/2022 c). In larger cities, collaboration between local organisations and private businesses within the oblast often improves as both sides become more experienced with the response (KII 04/04/2022 b).

Response constraints

Lack of capacity: the capacity of activists and volunteers may be starting to wane because of burnout following two months of constant assistance (KII 04/05/2022 b; KII 04/05/2022 d; NP 06/05/2022). People and organisations new to providing relief may lack experience in human resources or financial and administrative management (KII 05/04/2022 b; KII 19/04/2022 b). Some smaller efforts may receive more aid than they can effectively manage (KII 06/05/2022 a). Human resource capacities may be dwindling, especially as many return to their daily activities, support their own livelihoods, or continue their studies (KII 19/04/2022 b; KII 05/05/2022 b). Other constraints include a lack of transport capacity, fuel scarcity, a lack of funds, and a lack of available goods (KII 25/04/2022 a). National and international donors are not always willing to provide funding for local efforts not officially registered as NGOs (KII 06/05/2022 a). Local organisations unable to prove that they operate according to humanitarian principles are currently not considered for partnerships or receive funding from international humanitarian actors (KII 04/05/2022 b; KII 05/05/2022 b).

Insecurity and risks: security risks are high for volunteers who transport goods to conflict-affected areas, and there are short windows of opportunities for aid delivery (CF SSS

03/05/2022). There are reports of the detainment of volunteers (Insecurity insight 25/03/2022). Some volunteers have lost their lives while accessing conflict-affected areas (OCHA 04/04/2022; The Times 07/03/2022; KII 05/04/2022 b). Consequently, finding volunteers to reach particular areas is a challenge because of the security situation, especially the risk of shelling (CF SSS 15/04/2022; KII 04/04/2022 d). When there is a disruption to the window of opportunity to deliver aid, volunteers may divert it to other accessible communities at the last minute (KII 06/04/2022 b). The targeting of aid workers has caused people to fear close identification with organisations, particularly in areas close to active conflict (KII 07/04/2022 c; KII 06/04/2022 b). Security management in volunteer groups differs depending on the knowledge of their members on the topic but is generally insufficient, placing volunteers at higher risk than other humanitarian responders (NP 06/05/2022).

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

International organisations have scaled up their operations in Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion but only represent a portion of the humanitarian response in the country (KII 05/05/2022 b). The international humanitarian response heavily relies on Ukrainian counterparts to reach areas with high access constraints, namely remote communities and areas experiencing heavy fighting. Organisations use working relationships established prior to February 2022 to hand over relief shipments and leverage the local capacity to store, organise, and distribute aid. They also implement ad hoc and network-based solutions with new local counterparts for situations in which prior relationships are insufficient (KII 15/04/2022 a; KII 18/04/2022 a; KII 05/05/2022 b). Within the international humanitarian system, organisations deliver aid via agreements between governments, between international organisations and public authorities, or directly from international organisations via local implementing counterparts.

The cluster system

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee activated the humanitarian cluster coordination system in December 2014, after the start of armed conflict in the Donbas region in mid-2014. Following the February 2022 invasion, the cluster system expanded to cover the whole of Ukraine (OCHA 24/03/2022; KII 05/04/2022 d). The system coordinates operations through ten clusters and three subclusters, with a UN agency leading each. As at 5 May, 227 humanitarian responders (excluding anonymised food security and health responders) operated within the humanitarian cluster system in Ukraine, more than half of which (136) were national NGOs. The rest comprised 53 INGOs, eight government institutions, seven UN agencies, five international organisations, four private entities, and 14 other responders (OCHA 06/05/2022). A Humanitarian Country Team consisting of UN agencies, funds, and programmes, national

NGOs, and INGOs is also present in Ukraine (UNCT 24/05/2021). Because of security concerns, the international response is not organised via an established humanitarian central hub with sub-offices but through temporary field presences ready to evacuate on short notice. Their existing presence in Donetsk and Luhansk non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) has been maintained (OCHA 08/04/2022).

Chernivtsi, Dnipro, Kropyvnytskyi, Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and Ternopil operate as logistics hubs, with storage solutions for responders within the humanitarian cluster coordination system. These solutions include coordination capacity in Lviv and Dnipro and information management capacity in Lviv, both by the Logistics Cluster. Dnipro is the most advanced logistics hub for international humanitarian organisations, from which aid is delivered to northern, eastern, and southern oblasts (KII 15/04/2022 a; Logistics Cluster accessed 23/05/2022).

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present in Ukraine via the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the URCS. National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies from over 40 countries have also provided support or engaged with the response in the country. Coordination comes from discussion at the national, regional, and global levels, as well as a focus on coordination with National Societies in neighbouring countries (IFRC 01/04/2022). The IFRC is currently coordinating cash assistance for 360,000 people in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, with plans to expand longer-term assistance for two million people (IFRC 12/04/2022). The ICRC receives requests on needs from local authorities (KII 07/04/2022 a).

Response constraints

Scale-up of response: the international humanitarian system had been present in the Donbas region since 2014, but many organisations evacuated their staff in January and February 2022. These evacuations left a response gap initially filled by local civil society (Left Bank Analytics 04/04/2022; KII 28/04/2022 a). While international organisations have since re-established their operations, some response gaps in eastern and southern Ukraine remain, as the coordination of operations has moved to western Ukraine (KII 29/04/2022 a; KII 05/05/2022 b). The mobilisation of men ages 18–60 hampers the hiring of national staff. Currently, there is an exemption for staff at UN agencies, but oblast authorities are not always aware of this exemption (KII 28/04/2022 a). Much of the international focus between 2018–2022 has turned from humanitarian towards development efforts, and a lot of the scaling up efforts involve expanding operations, establishing sufficient local presence, and hiring local staff (KII 20/04/2022 c; UNSDG accessed 19/05/2022). In 2021, international humanitarian systems were preparing to hand over their operations to local authorities and CSOs (TNH 11/04/2022).

Registration: the previously long and tedious registration process for INGOs was halted at the beginning of the invasion, with no new registration possible, but was reinstated in early May. While easier than before, local legal assistance will likely still be required to ensure a smooth process. Throughout the conflict, INGOs have had to improvise, for example, by paying cash for services. Through registration, hiring staff as employees will be possible (KII 28/04/2022 a; GoU and OCHA 27/04/2022).

Coordination: the ability to manage the surge and scale-up of operations has varied between clusters (KII 28/04/2022 a). There have been negative reactions by Ukrainian responders regarding a perceived slowness in the scale-up of the humanitarian system, especially at the beginning of the crisis. On the other hand, some humanitarians have noted that the scale-up happened faster than in other crisis contexts (KII 28/04/2022 a; KII 05/05/2022 b).

Humanitarian principles: humanitarian principles, such as neutrality and impartiality in aid delivery, can become a point of contention when humanitarian responders face government authorities and newly founded local organisations responding to a humanitarian crisis resulting from a military invasion of their territory. Some humanitarian responders have reported the mixing of humanitarian and military NFIs in the same vehicles. They have also reported that some government representatives do not distinguish between assistance for civilians and soldiers, even claiming the latter to be a prioritised population group (KII 22/04/2022 b). Military mobilisation and the activity of some volunteers providing support for military entities and civilians have blurred the line between civilian and military needs (Nonviolent Peaceforce 06/05/2022). This situation is particularly a concern for international organisations wishing to partner with local responders who have to do their due diligence to make sure that humanitarian principles are respected (KII 05/05/2022 b).

Patterns of displacement: current internal displacement patterns relating to the Ukraine crisis differ from those traditionally seen in other humanitarian crises, creating challenges for prioritisation and response planning. IDPs have returned permanently or periodically to their homes to gather more items, safeguard their belongings, or even work for a short period before moving back to a safer location. The cost of living and housing availability drive movement between safe locations (KII 22/04/2022 b).

Sanctions: sanctions on people and entities thought to be supporting and participating in the invasion could cause impediments in the implementation of activities by international humanitarian organisations that require coordination with sanctioned entities, especially in areas outside the control of the GoU. On 13 April, the EU amended its sanctions regime to allow humanitarian organisations with an existing partnership with the EU to cooperate with people and entities under EU sanctions. This condition entailed that the provision of funds or economic resources is exclusively necessary for humanitarian purposes in Ukraine (DRC 08/04/2022).

Access: access to affected populations remains a big challenge for international organisations. Air travel is not possible. Even after the establishment of a supply chain from the western Ukraine to central parts of the country, last-mile supply to southern and eastern areas are also a challenge; local counterparts almost exclusively handle delivery and distribution (KII 20/04/2022 c). A lack of fuel, checkpoints manned by Russian forces, and damaged critical infrastructure also pose access challenges to the delivery of assistance by international responders (KII 10/04/2022 a; WFP 18/04/2022; KII 04/05/2022 a KII 04/05/2022 b; KII 04/05/2022 d; PBS 25/04/2022; KII 05/05/2022 b; ACAPS accessed 09/05/2022).

Safety and security: safety and security are limiting factors in aid transport and delivery, particularly in the eastern and southern parts of the country where the conflict continues. Finding drivers willing to go there is challenging, especially when parties to the conflict state they cannot guarantee the safety and security of convoys (KII 15/04/2022 a; KII 21/03/2022 a). UXO contamination poses a threat to humanitarian responders and returning populations. On some routes, the presence of mines and UXO limits the size of vehicles allowed (KII 09/04/2022 b).

Humanitarian hubs and local organisations and volunteers bring humanitarian aid to **Kharkiv oblast**. Active conflict and a lack of information on the accessibility of distribution points often hinder the population from leaving the shelters to receive assistance. Although there are many responders present (including the oblast administration and local organisations and volunteers), they mostly act on their own with no coordination between them (KII 09/04/2022 b). The amount of humanitarian aid increased significantly in April, but delivery to areas under fire remained a challenge (KII 04/04/2022 e; KII 05/04/2022 b; KII 07/04/2022 c).

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS OF RESPONSE

The involvement of many responders in the response, including those with no experience in relief provision prior to the conflict, has led to the existence of parallel coordination systems (KII 14/04/2022 a). Parallel systems lead to various issues, including duplication, gaps in information regarding who is operational where, and a general lack of ability to check if aid actually reaches those most in need (KII 22/04/2022 b; KII 18/04/2022 a).

The GoU and the international humanitarian system

The international humanitarian system receives information on needs from the GoU and the OMAs based on the combined requests from hromadas (CF SSS 15/04/2022). Depending on their capacity, OMAs can also reach out to INGOs to ask for in-kind assistance to cover the needs of their population (CF SSS 13/05/2022). While some OMAs coordinate with international humanitarian responders, the situation is not equal across all oblasts. Around 80% of OMAs had no previous experience in responding to a humanitarian crisis and were unfamiliar with the international humanitarian system and humanitarian principles. This situation has sometimes translated into impatience with delays in the reception of international aid and a lack of coordination with international responders (KII 20/04/2022 c; KII 22/04/2022 b; KII 03/05/2022 a).

Some OMAs report having very little information from the international community, which has increased frustrations (KII 14/04/2022 a). In other cases, OMAs report that after communicating on needs with international organisations, they receive insufficient feedback on the response and remaining needs. There have also been reports of the aid provided being inappropriate for the living conditions of the targeted people (such as the distribution of food that needs to be cooked in areas where gas or electricity cuts make cooking impossible or limited) (DRC 08/04/2022).

Coordination with OCHA at the oblast level is meant to be facilitated by the focal point system (OCHA 08/04/2022). With lengthy hiring procedures, the system has been implemented with existing local OCHA staff (KII 20/04/2022 c; KII 28/04/2022 a). The focal point system should be able to help counterparts provide crucial contact information from local authorities and give them brief overviews of the humanitarian situation. The problem is that staff are mostly not physically present in the oblasts, and most of them have to cover more than one oblast (KII 28/04/2022 a).

The GoU and NGOs

OMA authorities can also provide assistance to national NGOs depending on their networks (CF SSS 13/05/2022). To access aid coordinated by the GoU, local NGOs provide the appropriate official letters. Local NGOs with their own supplies and networks, however, tend to avoid involving high-level authorities in their operations and instead directly cooperate with the heads of different departments, like the police or the railway system (KII 04/04/2022 c; KII 07/04/2022 d; KII 19/04/2022 b). Smaller organisations or individuals face bureaucratic challenges in obtaining letters from oblast administrations, leading them to independently connect with donors instead (KII 05/04/2022 b). Typically, every oblast has an established council of local NGOs that function under the deputy head of the regional administration, but the specific functions of the council vary from oblast to oblast (KII 29/04/2022 a; KII 03/05/2022 a).

The international humanitarian system and NGOs

The international humanitarian system relies on NGOs for partnerships. Prior to February 2022, the system had some pre-existing partnerships with national NGOs, but these have not been enough for the current crisis (KII 20/04/2022 c). For national and local NGOs, accessing the international system may be a challenge. Bureaucracy, language barriers, and a lack of capacity hinder national and local NGOs from linking up with the international system (KII 11/04/2022 a).

While around a half of Ukrainian NGOs surveyed since February 2022 reported receiving some form of humanitarian assistance from state or international counterparts, around one-third reported not having received any support. Ukrainian NGOs highlighted financial assistance as the most desirable form of support. While a vast majority of the surveyed NGOs presented openness to partnering with other organisations, less than 10% expected to receive support from international counterparts (Zagoriy Foundation 18/04/2022). Local NGOs mostly highlighted the need for the joint coordination of activities and information sharing for potential partnerships.

Logistics structures have developed among organisations that do not have access to established formal structures, do not know how to engage with them, or do not wish to engage with official and international response because of perceived slowness (KII 03/05/2022 a). Resources for aiding NGOs in the international standards have been made available in both Ukrainian and English (OCHA accessed 11/05/2022).

The international humanitarian system and informal networks

There is a disconnect between local responders and the international humanitarian system, with knowledge gathered from the local level often not reaching international organisations. Local volunteers have expressed the desire to be more involved with an international response that would take into account the needs of local groups (Nonviolent Peaceforce 06/05/2022). First-time relief responders have limited prior experience in operating within a humanitarian response with a large international component. As a result, they often lack knowledge in coordinating with traditional donor organisations and INGOs or producing the reporting typically expected by the humanitarian sector (KII 05/05/2022 b).

The GoU and informal networks

While information sharing is effective in many cases, local responders sometimes report lacking information from local authorities to better coordinate assistance efforts (KII 25/04/2022 a). Information sharing may be challenging between volunteers who access rural areas and the local authorities because of a lack of capacity, particularly in terms of data collection (CF SSS 03/05/2022). The reliance on social media channels for communication means that people without reliable mobile data connection may not have access to the latest information regarding assistance (CF SSS 03/05/2022). In bigger cities, people are generally informed about humanitarian response mechanisms, which is less likely the case in rural areas (KII 11/04/2022 a).

INFORMATION GAPS

Response by oblast: because of the wide differences in how individual oblasts organise themselves, it has not been possible to extract information on administrative structures for humanitarian relief from all 24 oblasts.

Diversion of aid: there is limited information on the distribution of aid by Russian forces and NGCA authorities and the potential diversion of this aid. On 31 March, Russian forces reportedly confiscated 14 metric tons of food and medicine aid headed for Melitopol (Interfax 31/03/2022). In Kherson oblast, Russian forces allegedly collect a share of goods as a condition for allowing aid distribution by local civil society volunteers (Left Bank Analytics 07/04/2022). The situation at the Ukrainian-Polish border is inconsistent; while rules and procedures are in place, some responders report instances of corruption and diversion of humanitarian aid towards the military. Some smaller-scale responders have also reported avoiding using OMA humanitarian hubs out of fear of losing track of their relief supplies. There have been several instances of the redirection of humanitarian cargo by Ukrainian authorities; most

involved cargo addressed to unspecified addresses or to smaller operations (involving local volunteers or NGOs) (KII 25/03/2022 a; KII 04/05/2022 a; KII 04/05/2022 b; KII 06/05/2022 b).

Scale of first-time responders' assistance: there are multiple reports of grassroots movements operating in Ukraine, but it has not been possible to estimate their impact in meeting humanitarian needs. Faith-based communities, the diaspora, and volunteers, both locally and from outside Ukraine, are making a huge effort to provide humanitarian assistance. In many cases, however, they are operating independently of known coordination systems, making the quantification of their response challenging.

Response in Russian-controlled areas and NGCAs: there is extremely limited information on the modalities of aid distribution in Russian-controlled areas and NGCAs, mostly because of the security and legal risks of information disclosure. Independent humanitarian activity in these areas risks the arrest of volunteers or the confiscation of aid (Left Bank Analytics 06/05/2022). Organisations already previously active in the NGCAs of Donbas have adapted their response without the ability to scale up (OCHA 21/04/2022).

As at 23 May, Russian authorities stated that they had delivered up to 22,000 metric tons of aid to Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and seven other oblasts, including Kharkiv. These figures and the contents of the shipments have not been independently verified (OCHA 27/04/2022; MoD of the Russian Federation 23/05/2022). Anecdotal evidence indicates that some civilians are refusing humanitarian aid from Russian forces and are only accepting aid once their humanitarian conditions become dire (Ukrayinska Pravda 04/03/2022; KII 05/06/2022 a).

Russian forces currently occupy **Kherson oblast**, except for some northern localities on the border with Dnipropetrovsk oblast (ISW 10/05/2022). The aid system is informal and based on immediate needs and products available. It has a wide range of distribution modalities, such as apartment co-ops buying food and medicine for neighbours in need and restaurants offering free meals. Volunteer capacity is decreasing, however, as locally available stocks diminish. Local authorities have been using their own stocks, as no extra assistance is being provided. Municipal stocks are expected to run out by the end of May (Left Bank Analytics 07/04/2022). Displaced members of organisations already present in the oblast are in charge of coordination when possible, as engaging in activities that have not been authorised by Russian authorities is dangerous. Delivery of aid by local organisations is negotiated on a case-by-case basis and is not guaranteed (KII 06/04/2022 a). Russian humanitarian aid is sporadically distributed in the oblast, but local sources say civilians have set fire to aid several times in protest (Left Bank Analytics 07/04/2022; KII 06/04/2022 b).