

Country Update

Ukraine

(February 13, 2021)

Context and government response:

As of February 13 2021, 1 307,8067 cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Ukraine, including 25,457 deaths. The government has imposed lockdown measures and movement restrictions within the country on March 12, 2020. The measures were eased in May 2021. However, following a spike in COVID-19 infections in late summer 2020, the government reinstated many of the lockdown measures. The third lockdown was in place between January 8-24, 2021. As of February 2021, masks are still mandatory on public transportation and indoor public places and international travels are possible with a negative PCR test.

There is a shortage of protective masks and gear, putting the medical personnel and frontline responders – majority of whom are women – at increased risk. This is aggravated by “poor financing, complicated public procurement procedures, and unfinished medical reforms”, which have contributed to a chaotic and uncoordinated response by the government. The UNDP data from September 2020 shows that 84% of households lost income and 43% have at least one family member who has lost a job. The UN also assessed that SMEs run by women were more likely to be negatively affected by the impacts of pandemics, and 70% of the beneficiaries of assistance are women. Moreover, the pandemic disproportionately affected tourist and service sectors that are dominated by women.

Impact on women and on peace and security:



According to UN Women data, the number of reports of domestic violence doubled in the conflict-affected regions during the pandemic. The economic hardship in the oblasts near the contact line poses even a bigger threat on women, as the shelters for victims of violence are not always easily accessible. The restrictions on the flow of people between the government-controlled territories and the Luhansk and Donetsk regions controlled by de facto authorities has led to long lines at check-points and put the breakaway regions in a precarious economic situation, as they cannot access pension or social benefits they previously received from the Kyiv side. Many people living in the separatist regions also lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. What is more, none of the parties to conflict in Ukraine responded to the UN Secretary-General's call for the global ceasefire. There has reportedly been a surge in violent attacks and shelling along the contact line.

There has also been a surge in fake news that accompanied the pandemic. Some, including the European External Action Service (EEAS) have accused Russia of deliberately disseminating fake news and spreading disinformation, in order to sow chaos and distrust in national authorities and healthcare systems.

The disinformation can have serious impacts for the spread of the virus. For example, in Slaviansk, a city in Donetsk, Eastern Ukraine, many people refuse to accept the seriousness of the pandemic and adhere to the protective measures. According to a survey conducted by Ukrainian research company Gradus, only 20% of Ukrainians would refrain from going to work, even if COVID-19 cases were detected in their local area. Moreover, while most Ukrainians (almost 80%) are aware of the WHO-recommended hygiene measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus, only about 50% adhere to them. Both the awareness and the adherence to the rules is higher among the women.

Social services have been negatively affected and overburdened by the crisis. The central train station in Kyiv has been closed, forcing many homeless who take shelter there to sleep on the street or seek space in homeless shelters, which are understaffed and overcrowded. This means that social services are less readily accessible, including to women who may be victims of domestic violence.



Healthcare and social work sectors are dominated by women in Ukraine that puts them at frontline of the infection. Women medical workers reported they faced stigma and they were marginalized by their communities. Moreover, women reported an increase in unemployment and economic vulnerability, re-emergence of gender expectations, particularly in conflict-affected areas and in minority communities.

The pandemic had a negative impact on women's sexual and reproductive health and access to information. The cost of a test, obligatory to be admitted to the appointments makes the doctor's visits almost impossible for many.

The unemployment rate increased up to 8.9% with small businesses often led by women being the most affected. According to the GNWP & NYUCGA report, women were expected to carry out household duties, childcare and other responsibilities. Moreover, the report suggests that women were often tricked into webcamming, prostitution, and escort services through misleading job advertisements.

As stated in the GNWP & NYUCGA report, the surrogacy business was affected by the pandemic. With several thousand children born annually to surrogates, the COVID-19 border shutdown made it impossible for women to travel abroad. As suggested, approximately 1,000 babies might be born before the borders are fully open.

Response by women peacebuilders:

According to a GNWP & NYU CGA report on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Peace Activism, women were not active in COVID-19 task force in Ukraine and it is not clear whether they were part of the response team.

Consultations for the 2nd NAP on UNSCR 1325 have continued online, and GNWP partners have actively participated in them. GNWP partner, the Democracy Development Centre, has also spearheaded a civil society coordination committee for the drafting of the CEDAW shadow report, which continued to meet online during the lockdown. GNWP and its local partners have organized initial webinars and online discussions for young women, to raise their awareness about WPS and YPS resolutions, and provide them with a platform to discuss



their priorities and make recommendations for the NAP drafting process. However, the lockdown measures have had an adverse impact on women and on peace and security in the country.

For many women activists, the situation is challenging, since they do not have the necessary skills or equipment to be able to work online. The computers and software they use is often old and does not support online conferences. Many of them do not have skills to use the new platforms or their connection is limited in rural areas. Nevertheless, creative responses have emerged in civil society. An anonymous online diary platform “It seems to me” for the victims of domestic violence was launched in February 2021 by the Institute of Cognitive Modeling, the Ukrainian Red Cross Society. Another project is an interactive digital performance about domestic violence where spectators can change the ending.

GNWP partner, Democracy Development Center, and Zhiva Ya (Unity for the Future), a local civil society organization and GNWP partner in Kherson, are providing emotional and psychosocial support and information online, using its network developed through the work on promoting women’s participation, combatting violence against women, and localizing WPS to vulnerable women.

Unity for the Future is also providing the humanitarian aid for Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts: hygiene kits for elderly women and men, support for vulnerable families for school kits and clothes for children, medical equipment (tonometres and glucometers) and small grants for winterization for vulnerable families which live near the contact line. Women living in rural areas are organizing to share cars to deliver food and medication to older women and people with disabilities. Furthermore, the organization is carrying out gender caucuses ran by local authorities and supported by civil society that organize these activities in communities, with support from volunteers on preventing and countering gender-based violence, sexual violence related to conflict, domestic violence. The organization is also conducting the work with local authority of communities in Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts on the development of activities for countering of consequences of COVID-19, and strengthening the work on gender equality and gender-sensitive response to crisis. The organization provides mentorship for women in Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts as well as the



psychological support. Their work includes assistance to conduct gender budget analyses and inclusion of gender aspects into local programs.

