

THE PROTECTION CLUSTER INCLUDES SUB-CLUSTERS ON CHILD PROTECTION, GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND MINE-ACTION



IDPs are queuing for social benefits at Department of Social Protection
Photo: Radio Svoboda

PROTECTION CONCERNS

- Between 1 and 29 February 2016, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) recorded 31 civilian casualties: ten killed and 21 injured. Of them: 29 adults (two women, 24 men and three people whose sex is unknown) and two children (a girl and a boy). Half of the casualties were caused by ERW and IEDs: six killed and ten injured, urging for continued mine action on both sides of the contact line. Increased shelling caused 11 casualties (three killed and eight injured); and small arms caused four casualties (one killed and three injured). As of 1 March 2016, OHCHR has recorded 9,187 killed and 21,085 injured in the conflict zone of eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in mid-April 2014.
- On 16 February the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP) issued a letter ordering all MoSP regional offices to suspend social payments for IDPs until their residence address is verified either by the State Services of Ukraine, or by personally visiting Department of Social Protection (DoSP). These measures have led to the suspension of all social payments (whether IDP benefits or payment of pensions outside of IDP registration) in some regions (Kharkov). Implementation varies widely between different branches and between the oblasts. Suspension has led to the cancellation of 22,000 IDP certificates in Kharkov. Payments are suspended for 97,000 in Kharkov and 10,000 in Donetsk. Following verification of residence (according to different modalities), IDPs can have their payments reinstated. These measures and announcements have created anxiety amongst the IDPs which is illustrated by a sharp increase of phone calls received by information hotlines. This suspension affect the most vulnerable, those with less mobility and access to information, and also stigmatizes further IDPs from NGCA. These measures also put a lot of pressure on DoSP that lack the staffing and resources to cope and to conduct the required spot checks.
- While recognizing that the Government has the right to combat fraud, the Protection Cluster is concerned about the lack of transparency on the procedure followed and the lack of clear communication of the decision (and the criteria used) to those concerned. These verifications are in contradiction with the existing legislative framework. The Protection Cluster is also concerned that thousands of IDPs are at risk of having their IDP certificate cancelled and being cut from the social payments including targeted IDP assistance and pension. Displaced persons must have access to social services, benefits, pensions and bank services without restrictions and limitations.
- The Donetsk based NGO Responsible Citizen had to halt their humanitarian activities in February 2016. The head of the organization was detained from 29 Jan - 22 Feb and she and four other members of the organization have been deported from the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic'. This raises additional concerns regarding the already limited humanitarian space in the areas in NGCA.
- The situation at check points at the beginning of February significantly deteriorated the freedom of movement in the south of Donetsk oblast NGCA. The Zaitsevo-Mayorsk and Mariinka check points were closed for several days, because of the shelling and security concerns, creating additional pressure for the 3 remaining open corridors and making people to queue for hours to cross. Due to the closure of the Zaitsevo-Mayorsk and Mariinka check points there was a high risk of people stepping on landmines while taking alternative ways, especially those people commuting to work from nearby NGCA cities to GCA.
- There are gaps related to raising awareness of staff of secondary and vocational schools on adequate response and support of children in GBV cases. The problem relates to the lack of systematic educational events on relations between people using gender-based approach, sex and reproductive health education, GBV zero tolerance etc. To address this gap there are proposals from the sub-cluster partners to organize brief information sessions to raise awareness of school staff in GBV.

For more information please contact:

Christine Goyer, Protection Cluster
Coordinator, goyer@unhcr.org,
Tel: +38 050 382 5014

Annette Lyth, Child Protection Sub Cluster
Coordinator, alyth@unicef.org,
Tel: + 38 050 3805181

Ekaterina Kristesashvili, GBV Sub Cluster
Coordinator, kristesashvili@unfpa.org,
Tel: +38 095 134 2820

Marcus Brand, Mine action Sub Cluster
co-lead, marcus.brand@undp.org,
Tel.: +3 8050 312 13 44

Edward Crowther, Mine action Sub Cluster
co-lead, edward.crowther@drc-ukraine.org,

HIGHLIGHTS

- On 17 February Parliamentary hearings were held in the Ukrainian Parliament on the 'the Human rights situation of the internally displaced people and citizens of Ukraine living in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and the territory uncontrolled by the Ukrainian authorities in the area of the anti-terrorist operation'. The event brought together representatives of civil society regional and central authorities, international community and IDPs. The need for a national IDP strategy was raised, while it was recognized that vulnerable people are on both sides of the line of contact and that they should receive equal treatment. Unity and the notion of a unified Ukraine was widely supported. As follow-up, a written report on the hearings will be drafted and the chair of the Human Rights Committee agreed to hold regular meetings.
- The amendments to the Civil Procedure Code simplifying the procedure for establishing the facts of births and deaths on the temporary occupied territory of Ukraine entered into force on 24 February 2016. The amendments provide that a court, 24 hours upon a request, must issue a final decision recognizing the birth or death of a person in the temporary occupied territory of Ukraine. This decision serves for registration of the facts of births and deaths in the competent Registry Office. NRC ICLA reported the first successful case where the court decision establishing the fact of death was issued within a half working day.
- In Luhansk oblast during February, Help Age International (HAI) supported 4 local partners to provide psycho-social activities to 500 beneficiaries over 60 years of age in the form of art and music therapy across 6 areas (Novoaydarskiy Rayon, Schastye, Privolye, Severodonetsk and Svatovo). Additionally in Luhansk, HAI supported 2 partners to provide a social transport service in 4 areas, reaching more than 800 individuals. In Donetsk oblast during February, HAI supported a partner in Mariupol to support more than 100 individuals with psycho-social activities.
- On 25 February 2016 NRC ICLA carried out a seminar for 90 Heads and Secretaries of Town and Village Councils in Vovchansk, Kharkiv oblast and Novopskov, Luhansk oblast. Representatives of UNHCR, R2P, Departments of Justice and Social Protection, the State Secondary Legal Aid Center took part in the trainings covering general principles of humanitarian protection and assistance and IDP related legal framework concerning civil documentation and access to social benefits.
- During the month of February, NRC ICLA provided information to 3,736 beneficiaries during 233 group information session. In addition, ICLA Technical Specialists provided counselling to 518 and legal assistance to 53 beneficiaries. The most important issues raised by beneficiaries during the counselling sessions were civil documentation (47%), IDP registration (34%) and HLP rights (19%).
- Donbass SOS reports about 24% increase of calls received to their hotline in comparison with the previous month. It's directly linked to the social payment suspension – 24,5% from the total number of request (please see infographics).
- In February 2016 DRC Legal Assistance Unit operated in 16 oblasts and provided legal aid to 2,674 beneficiaries: namely 2,389 legal consultations, 285 administrative, documentation and court cases. Significant part of consultations (36%) concerned suspension of social payment.
- On February 3-5, the Child Protection Sub-Cluster in cooperation with UNICEF organized training for staff working in Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) in the Mariupol region. In total, there were 35 participants, The main issues discussed were child protection in emergencies, psychosocial support, impact of conflict on children; sessions on supply and database administration. The training was very well received and more in-depth training was requested for administrators/managers of CFCs, training for mobile teams and working session for finance coordinators.
- The national hotline for GBV survivors is now available around the clock, operated by UNFPA implementing partner La Strada. In its first weeks of 24/7 operation, the hotline received 1,755 calls from around the country, with 1,036 of these calls coming in during night-time and weekend hours. Most calls reflect situations of domestic violence in which women are physically or sexually abused by their partners or even kicked out of their homes. Callers are seeking both psychological support and legal advice in dealing with cases of domestic violence and child abuse. Though the majority of those calling the hotline are women who are experiencing violence, abusers also occasionally seek help.
- The working (expert) groups on GBV SOP development were launched in Kharkiv city and Zaporizhzhia region. These groups will develop the pilot SOPs that will be further introduced to other regions.
- During February 2016 members of the Mine Action Sub Cluster implemented information and awareness raising activities, in particular MRE, for around 166,000 people in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, including the distribution of MRE brochures in schools and colleges.
- The Joint UN Assessment Mission of Mine Action needs in Ukraine confirmed that mines, booby traps, and unexploded ordnance have a serious impact in eastern Ukraine and constitute a major threat to civilians. The mission reaffirmed the need for more systematic coordination of action to address the threat, better sharing of information and the rapid stepping up of humanitarian mine action activities.
- With the support of UNHCR, the Protection Cluster organized 2 trainings on Protection Mainstreaming in Kiev (one in English and one in Russian) gathering 36 participants. Different sectors were represented and a number of colleagues came from the field (West and East of Ukraine). The training offered a good opportunity to exchange good practices and offered a space for practitioners to reflect on their practices and get exposed to different ways of conducting daily humanitarian activities.
- UNHCR participated in a meeting on Collective Centers at MoSP. The meeting was attended by representatives of Kyiv Department for Social Protection, SES, Min of Regional Development, Center for Psychological Support and some owners of premises which are used by IDPs as Collective Centers. The owners of these premises were extremely frustrated with the situation and lack of action from the government. Some of them are reportedly facing criminal charges for huge debts incurred by these IDPs living in their premises.

