

Roundtable on Humanitarian aid Ukraine Second chamber of the Netherlands parliament.

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The war in Ukraine has major humanitarian consequences. According to recent data, 14.6 million people need humanitarian aid, of which 5.6 million are receiving aid. 6 million Ukrainians have fled abroad and there are 3.6 million internally displaced persons. Attacks on infrastructure have, among other things, affected the electricity and water supply and now it is already necessary to plan how the population will get through the coming winter.

There is a wide range of support for Ukraine worldwide, starting with the considerable military support and related volunteer activities. Since the full-scale war began in February 2022, large sums of additional budget support have been transferred to the Ukrainian government, for example via the World Bank. This means that salaries and pensions could continue to be paid. For this, and because agriculture has remained relatively strong, large-scale food crises as we know from other societies experiencing humanitarian crises have fortunately not occurred and the Ukrainian economy has not collapsed. There is also increasing attention for reconstruction, and large conferences have been held on how to organize and finance reconstruction. Finally, there is also humanitarian aid – which focuses on people and supports them in their survival in the here and now – that remains urgently needed.

Humanitarian aid includes a variety of activities. It can involve helping to house displaced people, and providing cash relief to families who would otherwise not survive. Mental health care receives a lot of attention so that people can better cope with their traumas. Care is mainly focused on the elderly, children and families who have been displaced or live in dangerous frontline areas.

Humanitarian aid is facilitated by the strength of Ukrainian society. The government is well organized, the health care system is functioning, there is a high level of education and expertise.

Although there are several hundred international organizations active in providing humanitarian aid, their work is mainly carried out by Ukrainian organizations. It cannot be emphasized enough that humanitarian aid – as well as reconstruction – must be coordinated by the Ukrainian government and that Ukrainian organizations can take the lead.

Some areas of concern:

1. The focus on humanitarian aid is sometimes suppressed by other forms of support, such as attention to reconstruction and development. The United Nations has budgeted 3.1 billion dollars in necessary aid for 2024, of which only 1.2 billion was covered halfway through the year. Unfortunately, there is currently a tendency to scale down humanitarian assistance, as other pressing crises take over the limelight.¹

2. The longer the war lasts, the more damage is done to the physical and mental health of people in Ukraine. 2.5 years after the full-scale war started, health facilities are overburdened, fatigue is setting in and resilience is decreasing. This applies to the directly affected population and to the Ukrainian citizens who have opened their homes to displaced persons. It also applies to aid workers. It is all the more important that the budgets are sufficiently covered in order so that they do not have to do the work of two or three people at the same time. This applies both in Ukraine and in Poland, where many Ukrainians are being hosted.

3. As usual, the complexity of society poses challenges to aid. In Ukraine, for example, there are some concerns about the Roma population, who can fall through the cracks of humanitarian assistance because it is thought that they cannot be internally displaced because they do not have a permanent home, even though they have indeed been driven away from their community of residence.

4. Ukrainian organizations are professionalizing, but there is still much to be gained. War situations and periods of recovery are generally known to see growing levels of financial and other misconduct. In this light it is especially remarkable that Ukraine has scored better on corruption indexes year after year since the beginning of the war in 2014. In 2014, the country ranked 142, which rose to rank 116 in 2022 and currently Ukraine ranks 104 out of 180 countries. Nonetheless, the score remains a point of concern. This points to the need for international organizations to ensure the checks and balances required for effective implementation. More important for the future of Ukraine, is to support the many initiatives of Ukrainian organizations themselves to develop codes of conduct and commit to external audits. (for example Rise Ukraine).²

5. As I already emphasized above assistance must be coordinated by the Ukrainian government and it should be aimed for that Ukrainian organizations take the lead in humanitarian action and reconstruction efforts. In a similar vein, it is important to ensure the inclusion and participation of affected communities to be the directors of their own life and stay committed to work together for a peaceful future of their country.

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https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ukraine?_gl=1%2a1s2z5gq%2a_ga%2aMTAxMzEyNTYwOS4xNzE3Njc5OTYy%2a_ga_E60ZNX2F68%2aMTcyNDQwMDUyNS4xMy4xLjE3MjQ0MDA1MzUuNTAuMC4w

² <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ensuring-ngo-accountability-reconstruction-and-humanitarian-relief-ukraine>