

The state of communication, community engagement and accountability across the Ukraine response

Snapshot report

Fourth edition. June 2023



About this report

This report is part of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)-funded CDAC project, 'Collective action on CCEA in the Ukraine response' – an initiative that aims to strengthen predictable and coherent CCEA and bridge capacities to drive change at the system level.

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Cover photo: Airstrikes and shelling on Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine left many civilians dead and injured and caused wide-scale destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure. Credit: OCHA/Dmytro Smolienko.

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Introduction

More than one year on from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, nearly 18 million people need humanitarian aid and protection.¹ People have been forced from their homes, with 8 million refugees scattered across Europe and more than 5 million internally displaced people (IDPs). In the last quarter of 2022, attacks to critical infrastructure disrupted electricity and internet access, water and heating – further challenging affected people and the ongoing humanitarian response.

Effective communication is a lifeline in times of crisis. The provision of actionable information can be a matter of life or death, and continuous dialogue helps people to make critical decisions. Safe and accessible channels for people to communicate with service providers about their needs and concerns can improve the quality, relevance and timeliness of the aid they receive.

Since May 2022, CDAC Network has published quarterly snapshots of the status of communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) across the Ukraine response. Over the last year, CCEA actors in Ukraine and border countries have demonstrated substantial commitment and action towards improving and embedding CCEA – including the establishment of coordination systems, rapid provision of life-saving information and the roll-out of feedback mechanisms.

This fourth edition of the snapshot report covers progress and remaining gaps and barriers observed during January–March 2023, with recommendations to improve collective CCEA efforts. The findings are informed by desk research as well as 26 key informant interviews conducted in March–April 2023, representing local/national and international organisations in Ukraine, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (see Appendix). It is accompanied by a [supplementary annex and interactive dashboard](#) of current CCEA activities in Ukraine and border countries.

Summary of findings

- Refugees and service providers need up-to-date information related to legal status and integration.
- Affected people in Ukraine still face barriers to accessing and navigating information.
- Social tensions continue to rise between refugees, IDPs and host communities, and between different refugee groups.
- Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, marginalised groups are being left behind in communication and engagement strategies.
- Collective approaches to CCEA and information-sharing between agencies remain weak links across response countries.
- Longer-term CCEA solutions require greater and more systematic engagement of local and national actors, including government.
- Language barriers continue to block refugees' access to information and services.

¹ OCHA (2023) [Ukraine: situation report](#), 10 February.

Findings on CCEA gaps and barriers

This section provides additional detail on the key CCEA gaps and barriers observed during January–March 2023. Key recommendations for responders are included for each finding.

Finding 1: Refugees and service providers need up-to-date information related to legal status and integration

While information needs have remained generally low in border countries, informants from across Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia all noted an uptick in information needs related to refugees' Temporary Protection status and proof of residency in the last quarter. Affected people, and service providers, lack clarity on the changes to laws and extensions of Temporary Protection, which affects people's eligibility for and access to services. An informant in Hungary noted instances where service providers refuse services to affected people as the expiry dates of their Temporary Protection cards do not reflect the extension that has come into effect and providers are not aware their status is still valid.

One informant also raised that it was increasingly difficult to engage and build trust with affected people who are stressed and anxious about their legal status. This is particularly the case with marginalised groups such as Roma communities or older people who have less access to information on their legal status (see Finding 4).

As in previous quarters, response actors in countries bordering Ukraine say the demand for information from affected people is around topics related to integration and access to assistance, including:²

- how to access healthcare services
- how to access cash assistance
- finding accommodation
- how to access childcare
- employment opportunities
- information about plans and timelines for services delivered by agencies
- information on referral pathways.

2 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network in border countries. See also: IOM (2022) [Hungary: displacement surveys – refugees from Ukraine and TCNs](#), December; UNHCR & REACH (2022) [Romania Multi-Sector Needs Assessment](#), December; REACH (2023) [Moldova: area-based assessment: Chisinau and Stefan Voda](#), January; [Slovakia: area-based assessment: cities of Bratislava, Kosice, Nitra, Zilina](#), February.

Recommendations

- Ensure that up-to-date legal advice and information on Temporary Protection, residency and immigration status is available and accessible to all, including service providers. Consult refugees themselves on how best to communicate complex information.
- Focus on signposting, curating and amplifying trusted online information on the most in-demand topics. Engage with user comments on social media posts to foster trust and help prevent the spread of misinformation.
- The most in-demand information needs to be readily accessible, easy to understand, and continuously refreshed or repeated even if the information has not changed, as people seek reassurance on these topics.

Finding 2: Affected people in Ukraine still face barriers to accessing and navigating information

A significant proportion of affected people in Ukraine still have unmet information needs – with 23% of IDPs, 15% of non-IDPs and 17% of returnees citing information as a priority need. For IDPs, information needs have increased from 13% of IDPs during the last quarter of 2022 to 23% in January 2023.³

The rise in information needs is likely related to the extensive damage to telecommunications infrastructure that continues to restrict information access in Ukraine.⁴ In January 2023, 63% of settlements in Ukraine reported disruptions to telecommunications and access constraints – a huge increase from 3% in September 2022, before the widespread attacks on infrastructure.⁵ Key informants noted that challenges to information access are especially severe in areas that lack internet coverage, particularly close to the frontlines where agencies and volunteer teams have limited access to face-to-face engagement with affected people.

As in the previous quarter, affected people continue to report difficulties navigating information about available services and how to access them. People struggle with information overload on websites and social media channels, causing confusion and reducing trust in the available information.⁶ According to Ground Truth Solutions, information circulating among personal contacts is important, but people are uncertain of its accuracy.⁷ REACH's Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) indicated that almost half of households across Ukraine reported facing barriers to obtaining humanitarian assistance, with the most frequently reported barrier being insufficient information on how to register for assistance and on where assistance was provided.⁸

3 IOM (2023) [Ukraine internal displacement report: general population survey, round 12](#), January.

4 ETC (2023) [Ukraine situation report #20](#), February.

5 REACH (2023) [Ukraine: humanitarian situation monitoring factsheet: focus on damage to infrastructure and disruptions to utilities](#), January.

6 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network with responders in Ukraine. See also: Ground Truth Solutions (2023), [Call for communication, collaboration, and cash: perceptions of aid in Ukraine](#), February.

7 Ground Truth Solutions (2023) [Call for communication, collaboration, and cash](#).

8 REACH (2023) [2022 MSNA bulletin: Ukraine](#), February.

Recommendations

- Review and understand the communication channels that people needing support use and trust. Engage with the full spectrum of these channels, including public and mass media and non-digital forms of public information. Seek support from relevant organisations if advice is required on how best to engage.
- Provide consistent and ongoing two-way communication in a variety of online and offline formats. Ensure those working directly with communities have up-to-date information to provide.
- Continuously engage with and support media actors in Ukraine to build resilient communication and engagement strategies. Media actors have a unique and critical understanding of which channels are used and trusted by whom.
- Regularly publish and promote accurate, verified information on social media feeds for people to share. Continuously engage with user comments on social media posts so that misunderstanding and misinformation can be quickly corrected and disinformation identified.

Finding 3: Social tensions continue to rise between refugees, IDPs and host communities, and between different refugee groups

Across the countries bordering Ukraine, social tensions continue to rise between refugees of different groups. Informants noted that this is primarily observed in shelters, refugee accommodation centres and school settings. Tensions are pronounced between Roma and ethnic Ukrainian refugees, with segregation between the two groups in shelters and schools. One informant noted that schools predominantly for Roma children are often of lower quality, exacerbating feelings of resentment among the community.

Relationships between host communities and refugees/IDPs are also increasingly strained. Against the backdrop of a harsh winter and cost-of-living crisis across response countries, informants noted that refugees and IDPs face disputes with members of host communities on access to assistance, employment and livelihood opportunities. For example, Moldovans are increasingly reliant on government support to cope with soaring energy prices and record inflation rates, and some refugees have reported feeling their community was blamed for the general reduction in quality of life and perceiving resentment about aid being provided to refugees.⁹

Recommendations

- Refugees are not one homogenous group. Consider how communication and engagement with one group of refugees may affect other communities. Having more open and transparent communication in multiple directions may help to build trust.
- Draw on and take advice from local partners with existing community relationships for longer-term engagement and communication plans to maintain social cohesion.
- Proactively engage with local media and authorities to provide consistent and accurate information to mitigate tensions and rumours among all communities.

9 REACH (2023) [The impact of cost-of-living changes on Moldovan and refugee populations](#), February.

Finding 4: Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, marginalised groups are being left behind in communication and engagement strategies

Informants across all response countries noted that, despite growing awareness around the CCEA needs of marginalised groups, these diverse needs are still not being consistently addressed. Roma people, elderly people, people with disabilities and people in rural and remote areas are increasingly being left behind in CCEA strategies and programmes. This exclusion is compounded for the many people at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities. The following CCEA-related issues were raised:¹⁰

- **Roma people** often lack access to the internet, tend to have low literacy and face systemic challenges to accessing information in border countries. Roma refugees may also not be comfortable speaking Russian or Ukrainian and may need to communicate in Hungarian or one of several Romani dialects.¹¹ Several agencies noted that Roma refugees with dual citizenship are at particular risk of being excluded from assistance, as they are not included in Temporary Protection data.
- **Older people** continue to face disproportionate challenges to accessing information and humanitarian assistance.¹² According to a report by HelpAge, 30% of older people in Ukraine reported needing information about support and being unable to access it. Of those who were able to access information, nearly half received it from word of mouth, compared to only 18% from online sources.¹³ Informants noted that older people particularly prefer to receive information face-to-face in community settings, but agencies struggle to meet this demand, particularly in Ukraine where access to frontline, border or rural areas may be challenging.
- **People with disabilities** face significant barriers to information access, with informants mentioning that the focus on online information means there are fewer printed materials in various accessible formats. There is a particular lack of accessible information channels for visually impaired people.
- **People in rural and remote areas** in both Ukraine and across border countries are less informed about services and assistance, with responders, volunteer groups and services concentrated in city centres.

Recommendations

- While the intention of inclusion is there, specific skills and knowledge are required to better communicate with and inform marginalised communities. Collaborate with specialised agencies with experience working with these groups.
- Use a variety of communication channels that are accessible to and trusted by different marginalised groups.
- Establish physical spaces for information-sharing within community settings and incorporate face-to-face communication in CCEA strategies.

10 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network with responders in all response countries. See also: ACTED et al. (2023) [Ukraine one year on: NGOs call for the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, localisation and durable solutions](#), joint NGO statement, February.

11 CLEAR Global (2023) [Language factsheet: Romani language in the Ukraine response](#).

12 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network with responders in all response countries. See also: Ground Truth Solutions (2023) [Call for communication, collaboration, and cash](#).

13 HelpAge (2023) [“I’ve lost the life I knew”: older people’s experiences of the Ukraine war and their inclusion in the humanitarian response](#).

- Use clear language and incorporate images, taking care to simplify complex information such as on processes and eligibility criteria.
- Ensure that information is available in formats that are accessible to older people and people with disabilities.
- Identify community-based organisations working in rural and remote areas and include them in CCEA coordination. Ensure they have accurate information on critical topics to share with affected communities.
- Consider how to encourage those with internet access to share information through face-to-face engagement with those who have difficulty accessing the internet.

Finding 5: Collective approaches to CCEA and information-sharing between agencies remain weak links across response countries

There was significant progress to establish coordination mechanisms over the past year, but the roll-out of collective approaches and information-sharing between agencies still appear to be weak links across response countries. At the regional level, informants reported limited communication between response countries, sharing of lessons learned and cooperation between agencies. Informants also noted that lots of information is collected from communities by agencies across border countries, but this data is not shared between organisations in a useful way and the feedback loop is rarely satisfactorily closed with communities. This fragmentation between agencies and lack of collective action was perceived by some informants to highlight the shortcomings of CCEA-related Working Groups in practice.

Reviews conducted by DEC in response countries echoed these findings, observing limited coordination between DEC agencies in Ukraine and border countries. Agencies were largely unaware of other agencies' operations within the same contexts, with no mechanism in place to share lessons and information.¹⁴

In Ukraine, multiple informants mentioned a collective service advisory mapping that was developed by the Protection Cluster in the last quarter. Despite the potential for the mapping to strengthen collective approaches and data-sharing, there was reportedly no consultation with organisations outside of the Cluster on the functionality of the service. Organisations were also given limited time to input and identify internal capacity to continuously update the information.

Recommendations

- Strengthen information-sharing and links between CCEA initiatives at the country and regional level to improve coherence and ensure data can be jointly used to inform programmes and decision-making. CCEA approaches should be mapped and transparently publicised among all response organisations and agencies.
- Promote mechanisms for data access, sharing, analysis and utilisation at country and regional response level.
- Prioritise responding to existing feedback rather than collecting and producing new data and analysis without closing the feedback loop.

14 DEC (2023) [Real-time response reviews: Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova and Hungary](#), March.

Finding 6: Longer-term CCEA solutions require greater and more systematic engagement of local and national actors, including government

Since the start of the humanitarian response, local and national actors have been integral in providing information and services to affected people. As the international response mounted, responders had to find ways to bridge international and local/national ways of working, establish a common understanding of CCEA, break down humanitarian terminology and jargon and build trust. [Past CDAC snapshot reports](#) have found that local/national participation in the international CCEA coordination mechanisms has increased but pathways to their engagement were not systematic in the broader international response.

This quarter, some informants noted general improvements in collaboration between international and local actors, particularly local NGOs and civil society organisations. Compared to the start of the response, local actors are now increasingly present in the coordination structure, have greater capacity and more trained staff in CCEA. Other informants noted that there are still training needs for local organisations and that partnerships can be difficult due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of funds and time.¹⁵ Local organisations at the community level also remain outside of the international response.

Of note was the consensus around the limited engagement of international responders with government- and national-level fora, in both Ukraine and border countries. Government is seen as largely absent from international coordination, but also deemed to be critical actors in seeking greater alignment for longer-term solutions. This perspective was echoed by the DEC real-time response review, which found that there are limited opportunities for DEC Members¹⁶ to collaborate with and support central or local government in response countries, and that local partners had stronger, more established partnerships with government.¹⁷

Recommendations

- Identify synergies between existing international approaches and central and local government policies, strategies and initiatives related to affected people and refugees in order to strengthen partnerships.
- Strengthen collaboration and pathways for engagement with local partners who regularly partner and coordinate with government authorities.
- Continue to promote participation of local and national actors in international CCEA coordination and interagency fora.
- CCEA efforts must begin with engaging with and using terminology and ways of working that are understandable and familiar to local actors, including IDP and refugee community response organisations as well as host country government and civil society.

15 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network. See also: Refugees International (2023) [Efforts to localize aid in Ukraine one year on: stuck in neutral, losing time](#).

16 DEC's 15 Member charities: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, Age International, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, International Rescue Committee Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision.

17 DEC (2023) [Real-time response reviews](#).

Finding 7: Language barriers continue to block refugees' access to information and services

Similar to past quarters, informants in border countries noted that language barriers and insufficient translation are persistent challenges for affected people. In Hungary, multiple informants noted that the lack of translation for non-Ukrainian speaking people is a particular issue when accessing health and immigration services. In Poland, it was noted that translation into Russian is still not readily available due to political sensitivities.

However, some notable progress has been made to increase language availability. For example, CLEAR Global and the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) provided translation and plain-language content revision for the ETC Chatbot and conducted training on communicating clearly with affected people for members of the Accountability to Affected People (AAP) Working Group and interagency staff.¹⁸

Recommendations

- Prioritise translation of official information into Russian, Ukrainian and marginalised languages, with other information services and online platforms directing refugees to those sources.
- Invest in accurate and consistent translations through use of professional translation services.
- Emphasise the use of plain language, as well as common agreed translations of concepts and terminology, noting that some more technical words used in humanitarian work may need more nuanced translation into full phrases rather than simple direct translation. Have translations of technical terms cross-checked with other organisations.

¹⁸ ETC (2023) [Ukraine ETC situation report #21](#), March.

Conclusion

The past quarter marked the sombre milestone of a year of response activities in the ongoing Ukraine crisis – and with it, substantial learning on coordinating and implementing effective communication, engagement and accountability in a complex response. Since the start of the response, diverse CCEA actors in Ukraine and border countries have demonstrated substantial commitment to CCEA – including the rapid establishment of coordination systems, provision of critical information and roll-out of feedback mechanisms. However, challenges remain in consistently rolling out these initiatives.

At this stage in the response, the findings in this report show how flexible information providers have to be to meet the needs of diverse affected people. For refugees, the greatest information needs are related to legal status and integration, with demand for this on the rise. For people in Ukraine, navigating the volume of online information is often the biggest challenge; conversely, they may struggle to access any information at all due to damaged telecommunications infrastructure. People travelling away from conflict may face all three of these information needs and challenges in quick succession.

Tensions continue to rise between refugees, IDPs and their host communities, as well as different refugee groups. Awareness of inclusion and language issues has grown, but on the whole this has yet to translate into action for better CCEA with marginalised groups and to build social cohesion. Finally, collective approaches, information-sharing between agencies and engagement of local and national actors are still fragmented and inconsistent.

As the response looks towards more durable, longer-term solutions, prioritising coordination, collaboration with local and national systems and services will be key. A sustained approach that strengthens, bridges and harnesses the CCEA-related skills, knowledge and capacities of diverse actors – including media, government, civil society and refugee-led organisations – will support the immediate humanitarian needs of affected people and help build the long road towards recovery.

Appendix: List of organisations consulted

Country	Organisations consulted
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emma Association • Hungarian Helsinki Committee • Menedek • Next Step Hungary Association • Patent Association • UNHCR Hungary
Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Congress of Ukrainians of Moldova
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLEAR Global (Poland) • Save the Children Poland
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM Romania • SERA Romania (supported by CARE) • UNHCR Romania
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFRC (Slovakia) • UNHCR Slovakia
Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBC Media Action (Ukraine) • Mercy Corp (Ukraine) • Norwegian Refugee Council (Ukraine) • OCHA Ukraine • ROKADA • Terre des Hommes • The Tenth of April • WeWorld • World Health Organization (Ukraine)
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEKS/EPER – Swiss Church Aid (Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Ukraine) • IFRC Regional Office • UNHCR Regional Office



CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

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