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**New Report Exposes Humanitarian Community’s Failure to Support Women and Girls Displaced by Ukraine Conflict**

*Seven-part regional assessment from VOICE, in partnership with HIAS, analyzes the needs of women and girls displaced by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and women’s organizations responding to the emergency across six countries.*

**NATIONWIDE –** The global humanitarian community is failing to meet the needs of women and girls displaced by the Russia-Ukraine war and adequately support women- and girl-led organizations on the frontlines of the emergency response, according to a new, [seven-part regional assessment](https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close/) from [VOICE](https://voiceamplified.org/), a feminist organization dedicated to eradicating gender-based violence (GBV) and holding the humanitarian aid sector accountable to women and girls, and [HIAS](https://www.hias.org/), an international Jewish humanitarian organization that provides critical support to refugees.

The reports were developed by VOICE’s 10-member assessment team, who spent four weeks interviewing women’s right organizations (WROs), frontline workers, local NGOs, United Nations (UN) agency actors, and internally displaced and refugee populations in Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. VOICE also conducted virtual interviews with WROS and other local organizations in Ukraine. The complete assessment series can be viewed [**here**](https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close/).

The report paints a vivid picture of the challenges faced by women and girls in Ukraine as well as other forcibly displaced persons (FDPs[[1]](#footnote-1)) after they leave Ukraine, and the need to ensure that WROs and other local actors are integrated into response design and leadership from the beginning.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

* **Sexual exploitation and trafficking:** Displaced women and girls are at high risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking, especially at border sites. VOICE documented reports of sophisticated trafficking attempts, including one man in Romania who posed on social media as a representative of an American OB/GYN association, offering to provide shelter to pregnant women.
* **Exploitative labor:** Women and girls are being forced into exploitative labor in both institutional and informal settings: for example, washing dishes all day long in exchange for shelter, or being requested by hosts in private homes to cook in exchange for their stay.
* **Disorganized response:** While the volunteer-led humanitarian response has been a feat of human generosity and compassion, it is also unsustainable and has left the door open for gendered exploitation and abuse of power. The UN and INGOs are increasingly arriving to support the response, but they often are doing so in a manner that undermines local capacities, especially those of WROs.
* **Essential resources:** Medical supplies, surgical equipment, and combat medicine specialists have been flooding into Ukraine to treat wounded soldiers, but care for women who have been raped is almost forgotten. Several of the countries surrounding Ukraine have experienced rollbacks in reproductive rights in recent years, making it harder for FDPs who are survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to access the resources they need.
* **Cash assistance:** Cash assistance isn’t reaching the women and girls who need it, or in the amounts needed. In some areas where cash assistance programs were supposedly in place, many forcibly displaced women, as well as staff and volunteers working with them, were not even aware of their existence.
* **Double discrimination against populations of concern:** Roma, LGBTQIA+, people of color, and other marginalized groups face additional challenges and discrimination: for example, trans women being forced to undergo humiliating ‘bio-medical’ checks at some borders, and those who have not undergone gender-affirming surgery being immediately conscripted and sent back.

*“The UN and other international organizations are failing to meet their own commitments to put local organizations and expertise at the center of their response,”* ***said*** [***VOICE***](https://voiceamplified.org/) ***Co-Founder and Executive Director Mendy Marsh.*** *“We cannot and should not combat this crisis without centering the response efforts on what women and girls and the organizations they lead know is critical. Disregarding their voices and essential input will set up crisis response to fail every time.”*

***“****We thank our partners at VOICE for this extensive look at the effects Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is having on women and girls throughout the region,” said* ***Rachel Levitan, HIAS Vice President for International Policy and Relations****. “Given our ongoing work to combat gender-based violence affecting refugees around the world, HIAS is proud to support this ground-breaking research, which will help governments and humanitarian organizations alike to mount a more effective response to the exploitation of women and girls.”*

VOICE and HIAS are calling on the UN, international NGOs, local governments and the greater humanitarian enterprise to:

1. **Fulfill their commitments to localization** by sharing and shifting power to women-led organizations. This includes ensuring WROs and other local actors are part of the (re)design of coordination structures from the beginning, and making emergency funds accessible so that WROs can redistribute aid to women at greater vulnerability.
2. **Address gaps in the protection** of women and children. This includes incorporating the views and contributions of women FDPs into program monitoring to ensure Accountability to Affected Populations, which all coordination systems, INGOs, and UN agencies have endorsed commitments to.
3. **Improve access to essential services** for women and girls. For border country governments, this means developing gender-informed strategies for response to the Ukrainian crisis, with participation of WROs, feminist groups, local NGOs, INGOs, and the EU.
4. **Ensure a gender-sensitive humanitarian response** by supporting women’s movements across the region. This includes but is not limited to supporting local feminist priorities, ranging from legal reforms and political participation to gender mainstreaming in public policies, ending violence against women and girls, economic empowerment, and more.

Detailed recommendations for region-wide action can be found starting on Page 34 of the report.

*“Women’s rights organizations in Ukraine and the surrounding region have been responding to this crisis since day one, and without direct support and sufficient funding, their life-saving support will run out,”* ***said VOICE Emergency Response Director Kelly Joseph.*** *“We’re looking at the entire humanitarian architecture, including the UN, the EU and the United States, when we say these organizations need your support as equitable partners.”*

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**About VOICE**

[VOICE](https://voiceamplified.org/) is a feminist organization confronting one of the world’s oldest and most widespread human rights abuses: violence against women and girls (VAWG). We power the revolutionary force of women- and girl-led organizations, fueling their efforts across the globe as they build networks, launch movements, and provide critical programs at the frontline of crisis, conflict, and disaster where VAWG is at its worst. Our approach, steeped in women’s rights practice, offers something new and necessary in the fight to end VAWG. We are working toward a world where girls and women are respected leaders in designing and implementing solutions to eradicate violence – both in their communities and within the halls of power. Ultimately, VOICE’s goal is greater direct resourcing of local women’s organizations and their solutions to address violence. We help meet the needs of women- and girl-led organizations in a growing number of countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Hungary, Iraq, Moldova, Myanmar, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, the United States, Venezuela, and Yemen.

**About HIAS**

HIAS, the international Jewish humanitarian organization that provides vital services to refugees and asylum seekers, has been helping forcibly displaced persons find welcome, safety and opportunity for more than 130 years. Currently working in more than 17 countries, HIAS is responding to the war in Ukraine through its core programming areas, including Economic Inclusion, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Legal Protection, and Prevention and Response for GBV, with a focus on violence against women and girls and individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+. In 2013, HIAS Ukraine helped establish an independent Ukrainian NGO “Right to Protection'' (R2P), which is now in the vanguard in the human rights movement in Ukraine, where it is a leading voice in the protection of the rights of IDPs, refugees, and stateless persons.

Learn more and take action at [HIAS.org](http://hias.org/).

1. The term forcibly displaced persons (FDPs, or forced migrants) used here includes FDPs and asylum seekers, as well as some economic migrants. Some foreigners living in countries neighboring Ukraine are technically economic migrants rather than refugees or asylum seekers; however this is a gray area depending on whether their movement was forced by a loss of livelihood related to the conflict, or other causes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)