

Briefing Note: From Emergency Response to Efficient Recovery in Ukraine: coordinated and focused efforts putting people at the centre

Ukraine Recovery Conference – Gdańsk, Poland, 25-26 June 2026

The Humanitarian NGO Platform in Ukraine, together with its 130 members, welcomes the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC) co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine in Gdańsk.

In the fifth year of the full-scale invasion and over a decade since the start of the war, **this is a critical moment to move from fragmented efforts towards a coherent, inclusive, and sustainable recovery.** We call on URC hosts and participants to deliver specific and accountable commitments with clear milestones that translate into tangible improvements in the lives of those affected by the war.

Ukraine's recovery must be people-centered, locally led, and connected to ongoing humanitarian response. In this regard it's crucial to:

- 1. Bridge humanitarian response and recovery, not replace one with the other.**
- 2. Invest in people and social systems, not only infrastructure.**
- 3. Ensure direct and flexible funding for Ukrainian CSOs and local actors.**
- 4. Guarantee meaningful civil society participation in URC and recovery governance.**

Commitments made at URC 2026 should include measurable milestones, transparent tracking, and mechanisms for civil society monitoring.

Recovery planning and coordination

Ukraine's recovery is taking place in a context of ongoing hostilities and repeated large-scale attacks which have heavily impacted critical civilian infrastructure as well as private homes. Over the past year, energy and water systems have been systematically targeted, causing disruptions to heating, electricity, and water supply and significantly increasing humanitarian needs. Meanwhile, the full-scale invasion has exacerbated the burden on local institutions, who are facing more acute needs in their communities with



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strained budgets, as vulnerable groups continue to grow in size¹. The widened gaps have been to the large extent covered by non-profit actors that mostly operate short and mid-term projects. However, this is not enough time to initiate systemic change. Thus, long-term, sustainable and systemic solutions are crucial to bring an effective recovery for Ukraine and Ukrainians' wellbeing.

Human capital is central to Ukraine's recovery. Displaced and otherwise conflict-affected persons need integrated support to achieve durable solutions and rebuild their lives in dignity, both in areas of origin and in new communities. This must happen through the systematic integration of gender equality, meaningful participation of youth, older people, people with disability and other vulnerable and marginalised groups, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) representing their interests, as well as support for the efficient return of veterans to civilian life and inclusive approaches to ensure that no one is left behind. Recovery efforts must also ensure accessible reconstruction of housing, infrastructure, and services, applying universal design principles, which requires sustained expert and technical support.

At the same time, humanitarian actors have already laid the foundations for recovery. The Humanitarian NGO Platform in Ukraine and its members are not only responders to the crisis; they are recovery actors, service providers, community connectors and accountability mechanisms. Interventions supporting the functionality of critical facilities, including hospitals, schools, and social institutions, are not only addressing immediate needs and gaps but also contributing to longer-term resilience. However, **this transition remains largely unstructured, underfunded and not properly coordinated, with limited alignment between humanitarian action, recovery planning, and national systems**. The government is taking steps to strengthen cooperation and coordination with local authorities and the non-governmental sector in the field of reconstruction (involvement in the drafting of strategic and legal documents, coordination platforms and meetings), but the process could benefit from more consistency and additional resources. **Without stronger efforts to address these gaps, recovery efforts risk remaining fragmented and inefficient, limiting their ability to respond effectively to the needs of the most affected populations.**

In the current context, there is still a need for synergy within the "triangle" of government, the private sector, and civil society, supported by international partners. In the lead-up to the 2026 URC, it is crucial to ensure that Ukrainian CSOs and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) operating in Ukraine continue to play a pivotal

¹ [Situational Analysis on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine](#), Global Disability Fund, March 2025



role in the recovery processes and are meaningfully, transparently, and sufficiently engaged in the URC to secure dignified representation of diverse community interests.

Key Recommendations

- **Ensure a stronger coordination between emergency, transitional and longer-term support** by aligning funding, planning, and coordination mechanisms along all relevant actors, including international donors, national systems and local governance structures. While increasing support to recovery, we should recognise the protracted nature of the crisis and the resulting continued humanitarian needs that must be systematically addressed.
- **Prioritise people-centred, inclusive and systemic recovery**, with sustained investment in social services, protection systems, employment and business opportunities, education, and mental health. Focus should be placed on women, children, youth, displaced populations, including Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and returnees, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), LGBTIQ+ communities and other vulnerable groups, in line with Ukraine's commitments within the process of EU integration. Ensure accessibility standards are systematically integrated into all recovery investments.
- **Strengthen the role of civil society, local and other actors in recovery** through increased, direct and flexible funding, meaningful participation, needs assessment and dignified representation of diverse community interests in decision-making processes at all levels. Particular attention should be paid to organisations established and rooted in local communities, and support should be provided to help them build partnerships with local authorities and the business sector.

Human Dimension

In addition to rebuilding infrastructure, Ukraine's recovery is about rebuilding lives and communities. With nearly a quarter of Ukraine's pre-war population displaced across the country and abroad, securing durable solutions for those forced to flee is central to its recovery. Protection and ability of refugees, IDPs, PwDs and other conflict-affected persons to achieve stability, access opportunities, and make voluntary, informed, long-term choices about their futures will be decisive in shaping Ukraine's demographic, social, and economic trajectory. **Investing in people, services, and**



support systems is essential to strengthening social cohesion and community resilience, while enabling a sustainable and inclusive recovery. Targeted, inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches remain essential to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups and caregivers. Coupled with the limited capacity of public institutions and hosting communities to meet needs in specific sectors and locations, this presents a gap that requires long-term, sustainable solutions.

With over **4.6 million IDPs**, internal displacement has evolved into a long-term recovery and governance challenge. Many displaced households continue to face **insecure housing, disrupted livelihoods, reduced access to healthcare and social services, and growing economic vulnerability**, particularly among women-headed households, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Repeated displacement linked to renewed escalation along frontline areas has further strained coping capacities and increased pressure on under-resourced municipalities hosting large, displaced populations. Lack of housing, services, and infrastructure can hinder evacuation or contribute to premature return of people to dangerous areas, as the effectiveness of evacuation directly depends on the readiness of host communities to provide adequate living conditions for people.

Addressing these challenges requires **stronger synergies between humanitarian response and recovery**, including investments in housing (housing programs), regulation of the rental market, local services, and economic inclusion, considering the principles of accessibility, alongside meaningful support to **locally led initiatives and participation of IDPs** in recovery planning through mechanisms such as IDP Councils.

While return will be an important component of recovery, a sustainable approach requires coordinated action by Ukraine and its partners to ensure that **return is voluntary, safe, dignified, supported and linked to investments in housing, livelihoods, economic integration and essential services.** Four years after its activation, the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), alongside analogous temporary protection regimes in non-EU countries, remains a cornerstone of the response for more than 6 million people displaced from Ukraine across Europe, providing legal stay and access to work and services. Although the EU extended Temporary Protection until March 2027 for the fourth time and adopted a Council Recommendation on transition in 2025, **progress towards longer-term solutions remains limited. Transition pathways beyond temporary protection are often non-existent, inaccessible in practice, or heavily restricted**, primarily limited to employment-based schemes and constrained by strict eligibility criteria and administrative complexity. As a result, many beneficiaries remain in prolonged uncertainty regarding their legal status and prospects, affecting their ability to access



stable employment and housing, continue education, reunite with family members, and plan the future. This disproportionately affects vulnerable groups who are **at particular risk of being left without viable post-temporary protection options and require tailored support both in host countries and upon potential return.**

At the same time, **return and reintegration frameworks remain underdeveloped:** dedicated voluntary return programmes are largely absent in host countries, and Ukraine lacks a comprehensive return and reintegration strategy supported by proper funding. Sustainable reintegration requires support for both host and return communities, including investments in local infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social cohesion. Ukrainian civil society organisations and IDP Councils supported by INGOs and international actors can play an important role in facilitating access to information, supporting community engagement, ensuring inclusive approaches and informing reintegration policies based on local needs and displacement realities.

Veterans, for their part, face significant psychological, social, and economic barriers affecting access to employment, entrepreneurship and available support opportunities, particularly among heavily wounded veterans and veterans with war-related disabilities who often require long rehabilitation periods before re-entering professional life. **Key challenges** include psychological trauma, difficulties in adapting to civilian life, limited access to trauma-informed and integrated support services, and lack of information about available programmes.

Evidence shows that **integrated approaches** combining financial assistance, business and vocational training, mentorship, and psychosocial support are most effective in supporting sustainable livelihoods, strengthening resilience, and promoting long-term social and economic reintegration.

Recommendations

- The Ukrainian Government, donors and humanitarian and recovery actors should strengthen long-term and locally led responses to internal displacement through better alignment between emergency assistance and recovery planning, focusing on affordable housing with accessibility standards, economic inclusion, and reinforced local service delivery, while ensuring meaningful participation of IDPs and local civil society, including the most vulnerable groups, in recovery governance processes.
- The host countries, the European Commission, and the Ukrainian Government must ensure a coordinated and inclusive transition from temporary protection that guarantees continuity of protection, supports local integration, and enables safe, voluntary, and



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informed return, considering several return scenarios. They should work together to prevent protection gaps, ensure legal certainty for all beneficiaries of temporary protection, including vulnerable groups and third-country nationals, and strengthen accessible transition into alternative, long-term national statuses in host countries and reintegration in Ukraine.

- The Ukrainian Government should develop and prepare in advance a response plan for a possible mass return of Ukrainians from abroad, including their access to economic independence and self-reliance, with particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable categories of the population and the readiness of social protection systems. The Ukrainian Government should as well establish a unified database of community needs and recovery capacities.
- The Ukrainian Government, donors, and humanitarian and recovery actors should strengthen integrated and long-term support for veterans' return to civilian life through financial assistance, business and vocational training, mentorship, psychosocial support and trauma-informed services, while expanding partnerships with local authorities and the private sector.

Local and Regional Dimension

Strengthening local and regional recovery efforts remains essential within ongoing decentralisation reforms in Ukraine, while ensuring a coherent approach across the country and coordination with the central authorities. **Supporting local authorities as primary duty bearers, as well as civil society and local communities, including vulnerable groups, and local economic opportunities, contributes directly to community resilience, service continuity, and sustainable recovery.**

Repeated attacks on energy infrastructure have severely disrupted heating, water supply, and essential services across Ukraine. Furthermore, the war resulted in extensive damage to private homes, severe environmental consequences, including soil and water resource contamination, ecosystem destruction, and increased public health risks. In response, humanitarian actors have increasingly integrated hybrid energy solutions, solar systems, and energy-efficient upgrades into hospitals, schools, and collective centres. Such an approach is serving as an entry point to longer-term recovery systems creating opportunities for stronger linkages and collaboration. Emerging cooperation between humanitarian, recovery, and environmental actors in Ukraine demonstrates increasing recognition that infrastructure recovery should not replicate pre-war vulnerabilities. Instead, recovery investments should support decentralized,



energy-efficient, and climate-resilient systems that reduce long-term operational costs, strengthen local resilience, and align with Ukraine's green transition objectives and EU integration pathways.

The continued reliance on collective centres highlights the urgent need for sustainable and long-term housing solutions for IDPs. While refurbishment and inclusivity adaptations remain necessary to ensure minimum living standards, greater investment is needed in social housing and longer-term accommodation options to ensure accessibility, safety and dignity for all affected people.

Recovery planning at municipal level should increasingly integrate energy resilience, climate adaptation, local services with inclusive approach towards the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, including accessibility for groups with low mobility, and public investment planning, while local authorities require additional technical capacities and cross-sector coordination mechanisms to achieve this goal. Local governments need in particular support in coordinated skills sharing in the field of human capital development, formation of a proactive approach to local governance and community development, application of the 'do-no-harm' principle and promoting social cohesion.

Considering the massive cost for repair, recovery and reconstruction only in such sectors as housing, energy & extractives, and water supply & sanitation, which exceeds USD 197 billion according to [RDNA5](#), collaboration with the private sector, investors, and businesses is crucial to support Ukraine's initiatives to have a resilient infrastructure and ensure stable access to critical services. Stronger cooperation between policy makers, institutions, other actors and the private sector is needed to create an attractive investment atmosphere and establish a supportive regulatory framework that enables long-term investments in infrastructure recovery and service delivery.

Recommendations

- Humanitarian and recovery donors and implementers should ensure that recovery efforts strengthen local systems, governance structures, markets and local service delivery through flexible, inclusive and locally coordinated approaches adapted to frontline and war-affected areas. They should facilitate keeping a single verified and up-to-date database of community needs and recovery capacities.
- The Government of Ukraine should prioritise the modernised and energy efficient restoration and sustained functionality of critical social infrastructure, including schools, healthcare facilities, and durable housing solutions for displaced populations, through subsidies and with the support of international donors, while ensuring inclusive and



gender-responsive approaches.

- Humanitarian and development donors should scale coordinated investments in resilient and renewable energy solutions to support long-term recovery, inclusive essential services, and local economic resilience.
- Investors and businesses should start exploring collaboration opportunities with government and local actors, seeking enhanced service provision through profitable investment, maintaining the interest of people (consumers), municipalities, and donors.

Economic and Agricultural Dimension

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) account for 99.98% of all business entities, provide

74% of jobs, and generate 64% of value added in Ukraine. The share of women entrepreneurs has steadily risen since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, with 61% of newly registered sole proprietors (FOPs) being women in 2025. At the same time, operating conditions remain particularly difficult in frontline and war-affected areas, where businesses continue to face insecurity, damaged infrastructure, unreliable energy supply, limited banking access, and reduced market demand. Women-led and IDP-owned small businesses have been disproportionately affected through firm closures, repeated sales contractions, and elevated default risks.

Existing MSME support mechanisms still leave important gaps, particularly for small rural entrepreneurs and enterprises led by women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, which often struggle to access finance, investment, and business development support. Women-led enterprises are underserved, with only 14% of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Ukraine in 2022 and 2023 including gender equality objectives, compared with a global ODA average of 46%. Yet, over one-third of job-seeking women and 29% of IDPs are unable to access economic opportunities due to caregiving responsibilities², while 21% of the youth (15-29) are NEET, most identify caregiving as the main barrier.

Economic and market systems support combined with investments in care infrastructure has shown promise in reducing reliance on humanitarian assistance while contributing to income generation, local economic recovery, and community resilience.

² Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA5), February 2026
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099022026094036395/pdf/P514499-22f93f3a-4278-42bc-b907-db9553d12069.pdf>



Where markets continue to function, economic recovery support should be prioritised alongside humanitarian assistance, like cash assistance, as a pathway toward self-reliance and sustainable local recovery. Agriculture remains one of Ukraine's key economic sectors and a critical source of food security and rural livelihoods, particularly in areas where agriculture remains the primary local economy. However, the sector continues to face major challenges linked to land contamination, energy disruptions, destruction of irrigation systems, climate-related pressures, and the absence of comprehensive compensation mechanisms for assets lost in occupied territories. Land contamination from mines and unexploded ordnance remains one of the most immediate barriers to recovery. Farmers continue to face impossible choices between remaining without their livelihoods and risking cultivation of potentially contaminated areas. At the same time, repeated attacks on energy and water infrastructure, such as the Kakhovka Dam destruction, have undermined irrigation, refrigeration, grain drying, processing capacity, and livestock production, particularly affecting smallholder farmers and producers working in perishable value chains. Additionally, drought, soil degradation, and environmental damage continue to undermine agricultural productivity and long-term resilience.

Ukraine's EU accession process presents both opportunities and risks for small and medium agricultural producers. While integration into EU markets offers long-term potential, compliance with EU standards will require substantial investments and technical support that many smallholders currently cannot afford without targeted assistance and phased transition mechanisms. Without accessible support pathways, there is a significant risk that smaller producers will be excluded from future markets and recovery opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Ukraine's international partners, in partnership with the Government of Ukraine and recovery actors operating in higher-risk regions, should establish targeted and flexible recovery financing mechanisms for MSMEs in frontline and war-affected areas, including blended finance models, grants, guarantees and responsive business support instruments for specific vulnerable groups that encourage transparent competitive market solutions.
- International financial institutions, in partnership with recovery actors, should strengthen support for rural entrepreneurs, smallholder farmers, and enterprises led by women and people from other vulnerable groups through improved access to finance,



technical assistance, business development services, market opportunities and investments in accessible childcare and eldercare infrastructure.

- The Ukrainian government and negotiating bodies must ensure that policies on EU accession and economic recovery include phased and accessible support mechanisms that prevent small-scale producers and small farmers from being excluded from future markets and recovery opportunities, as well as investments in infrastructure for accessible childcare and eldercare services.



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