

Small fish in a big pond:

Ukrainian organisations' (lack of) access to international funding

Tuesday 14 March 2023, 17.00-18.30 CET

24 February 2023 marks one year since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, thus escalating the war ongoing since 2014. In the months that followed, this crisis provided the backdrop for a number of conversations in the humanitarian sector, especially at policy and systems level: was there a role for international aid agencies, or would local organisations tackle the brunt of aid delivery, allowing for proper implementation of the localisation agenda? Within three weeks of the invasion, European public-private collective appeals such as Swiss Solidarity Switzerland), Giro555 (The Netherlands), Disasters Emergency Committee (UK) and Aktion Deutschland Hilft (Germany) had raised approximately 355 million EUR between them; by mid-April, the number had risen to almost 600 million, or an increase of 70% in the space of a month. The UN launched a \$1.7 billion appeal hailed as "among the fastest and most generous responses a humanitarian flash appeal has ever received", with \$1.5 billion pledged by the end of the launch event.¹ By contrast, the High-Level Pledging Events for Yemen (16 March 2022) and Afghanistan (31 March 2022) appeals fell short by roughly 70% and 45% respectively.²

The sheer volume of aid – the above number excludes bilateral funding provided by donor governments, as well as in-kind assistance – came with complications:³ how much of it would reach Ukrainian responders closest to the frontline? What would be the impact of the evacuation of international agencies' international staff? How much of this funding should aim to meet short-term needs, and how much should account for a longer timeframe? With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that the conflict and needs it creates are not a one-off incident. How does this impact the response, and relatedly the amount of money raised?

Reports by the Disasters Emergency Committee⁴ and Humanitarian Outcomes⁵ indicate that Ukrainian organisations and initiatives accessed less than 1% of the international funding; the brunt of it has gone to UN agencies. Ukraine does not lack in civil society: roughly 150 Ukrainian NGOs were "operational in humanitarian response prior to the current crisis [...] and nearly 1,700 newly formed groups have [since] applied to the government for registration as 'charitable foundations or public organisations'".⁶ During the first six weeks following the invasion, they

¹ UN News, "Ukraine: \$1.7 billion appeal launched to help refugee exodus, host countries", 1 March 2022: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113052>

² OCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Update – Issue 3 / March 2022 [EN/AR], 8 April 2022: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-update-issue-3-march-2022-enar>; Reuters, "Donors pledge \$2.44 bln towards UN appeal for Afghan aid", 31 March 2022: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/donors-pledge-244-bln-towards-un-appeal-afghan-aid-2022-03-31/>

³ Ed Schenkenberg, "Ukraine funds: Millions, billions, and expenses...", March 2022.

⁴ Disasters Emergency Committee, *Options for Supporting and Strengthening Local Humanitarian Action in Ukraine: A Scoping Exercise Report*, November 2022.

⁵ Humanitarian Outcomes, *Enabling the local response: Emerging humanitarian priorities in Ukraine*. March-May 2022, June 2022.

⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

were the only ones delivering humanitarian aid, and though international organisations then stepped in as well, their physical presence remained limited and primarily concentrated in west Ukraine and in neighbouring States. National and local organisations' frustration at the discrepancy between the work they provide and the funds they have access to is palpable, as illustrated by two open letters to international donors and organisations drafted by civil society organisations in both Ukraine⁷ and Poland⁸ asking for less bureaucracy and more balance of power between different actors.

Objective and expected outcome

The following questions will guide the discussion:

1. What has been your experience of Ukrainian NGOs benefiting from the promptness and generosity of the international funding response? What have been enablers or obstacles to their access to funding? To what extent are the rules and bureaucracy in place at the international level suited to fund informal/volunteer initiatives?
2. What needs to be done to ensure a better connection between traditional agencies' efforts and those of local volunteer groups in this crisis?
3. How has the funding volume impacted the relationship between national and local NGOs and international actors? How complementary are they?
4. An additional cut of the funding has gone to support States that neighbour Ukraine: what are the perceptions around this by different actors (local and national NGOs on either side of the border, coordination mechanisms, contributors to appeals such as those mentioned above)?

5. Is there a moral obligation to stop collecting funds in scenarios such as these, where the amount raised is enormous?

Organisation and participation

This public panel is organised and moderated by HERE-Geneva, in co-production with Trumanitarian. It will conclude Trumanitarian's five-part podcast miniseries, "One year of humanitarian action in Ukraine" and will open with a one-hour conversation between panellists, before the floor is opened *via* chat to attendees for a Q&A.

Location

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83676048633>

Time

Tuesday 14 March 2023, 17.00-18.30 CET

⁷ *If not now, when? An open letter to international donors and NGOs who want to genuinely help Ukraine*, 24 August 2022: <https://philanthropy.com.ua/en/program/view/akso-ne-zaraz-koli>

⁸ *Open letter to international donors and organizations that want to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland*, 17 October 2022: <https://konsorcjum.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Open-letter-to-international-donors.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1aBPVMRwl4VQemmTrsFUGFM0Kvrj6202oXgr21h8KfEYR5pulKGH3rBys>