

Human capital: Healing, reintegration and empowerment

The recovery challenge

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine will have long-lasting consequences for Ukraine's human capital. UNHCR estimates that around one-third of Ukraine's pre-invasion population is currently displaced, either internally (5.1 million) or as refugees abroad (8.2 million, of whom an estimated 90 per cent are women and children). Researchers calculate that Ukraine's population, which was already ageing rapidly before the war, could potentially fall by 30 per cent by 2052. Population decline, along with war-related injuries among those who remain, will create challenges for Ukraine's labour market. Meanwhile, the number of people who are vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion – such as those in poverty, living with disabilities, older persons, single-parent families and veterans – is rising and putting increased pressure on Ukraine's social safety net. Almost one-half of the population is now enrolled in some form of social protection programme. Mental health practitioners warn of a looming mental health crisis and emphasize the urgent need for support. Education services are also severely disrupted, and the war has profoundly impacted the lives of young people.

Policy recommendations

To modernize and transform the country post-war, Ukraine and its partners must:

- 1. Invest in effective and innovative education.** Efforts must focus on rehabilitation, reconstruction and re-equipment of educational institutions at all levels to be disaster-resilient, inclusive and accessible, while providing high-quality education for war-affected children and young people. Vocational education and entrepreneurship should be developed and popularized via rapid and sustainable initiatives involving veterans, women and young people. The higher education system must work to reduce the significant mismatch between young people's interests, skills and education, and the available career options.
- 2. Prioritize livelihood interventions which reflect economic and demographic realities.** Following the war, Ukraine is likely to have a larger proportion of female-headed households, single-earner households and households which include individuals living with disabilities – sometimes in displacement. Interventions such as targeted employment and reskilling programs must be designed to ensure that individuals can at least fulfil their socio-economic needs. Interventions must also be underpinned by thorough gender analysis, prioritizing the households mentioned above and taking into account their unique circumstances.
- 3. Create conditions for the return of Ukrainian refugees and the reintegration of internally displaced people (IDPs).** Measures could include: developing

systems for disaggregated data collection about displacement; formulating a policy for return; creating information resources which help IDPs and refugees to take informed decisions about return; improving cross-government information-sharing and coordination; and promoting social cohesion in hosting and return locations via dialogue and trust-building initiatives, and ensuring there is no rollback of women's rights. Policies aimed at fostering links with the Ukrainian diaspora should also be considered, as some Ukrainians may choose to remain outside of the country long-term.

- 4. Develop state programmes to support the creation of accessible working environments for people with disabilities.** To ensure participation in the labour market, the programmes must include consultations with employers about workspace adaptations, assistive technologies and flexible working arrangements. Cities should drastically improve the accessibility of public infrastructure (e.g. transport).
- 5. Ensure access to healthcare and rehabilitation for people with disabilities.** The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 23,821 civilian casualties in Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 14 May 2023 (8,836 people killed and 14,985 injured). Access to quality healthcare must be provided for all in need, especially in areas most affected by the war and occupation. In addition, it is crucial to strengthen Ukraine's rehabilitation services and to expand the disability inclusion agenda.
- 6. Prioritize mental health support by investing in healthcare capacity and counselling for individuals suffering from psychological trauma.** It is estimated that up to 9.3 million people will need psychological assistance due to the war. This number includes former military personnel and members of the defence forces, their family members and civilians who were affected by conflict. Provision of mental health services for affected populations – particularly survivors of sexual and gender-based violence – and measures to overcome the stigma around mental health support are crucial both to strengthen social cohesion and to ensure a decent quality of life for those affected.
- 7. Support an inclusive recovery process.** A 'whole of society' approach should allow meaningful participation by local civil society actors, women-led organizations and vulnerable groups, including but not limited to IDPs, older people, people with disabilities, veterans and young people. The war has severely affected young people in Ukraine, but has also motivated them to help with the emergency response. Ukraine and its partners should invest additional resources in initiatives that channel youth engagement in the recovery process – creating and supporting participatory mechanisms, youth empowerment programmes, youth-led initiatives and other entry points for civic engagement. Ukrainian grassroots voices need to be brought into international discussions on recovery.



More resources

UNDP et al. (2023, forthcoming), *UN Human Impact Assessment*, <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/human-impact-war-ukraine>.



UNDP et al. (2023), *Impact of war on youth in Ukraine*, <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/impact-war-youth-ukraine>.