

## **SYNTHESIS REPORT**

# **SYNTHESIS OF EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE ON THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN UKRAINE**

**Final Report**

**August 2025**



## **Management, funding, and implementation of the evaluation**

The synthesis was commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG), an associated body of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). It was funded by OCHA, UNICEF and WFP. The synthesis was conducted by two consultants.

## **Acknowledgements**

The synthesis team would like to thank the members of the Management Group for their guidance and support throughout the synthesis process. We also acknowledge the contributions of humanitarian actors who shared their evaluative evidence and learning papers. Our appreciation is extended to the representatives of the Government of Ukraine for their interest and participation.

### **Synthesis Team**

Martine Van de Velde, Team Leader  
Claudia Manili, Data Scientist

### **Evaluation Management**

IAHE Steering Group Chair  
Ali Buzurukov

### **OCHA Evaluation Manager**

Nicole Henze  
Remi Vespi

### **Synthesis Management Group**

Alexandra Chambel (WFP)  
Beata Matysiewicz (OHCHR)  
Joel Kinahan (UNHCR)  
Michele Tarsilla (UNICEF)  
Miki Tsukamoto (IFRC)  
Nicole Henze (OCHA)  
Volker Hüls (ICVA)

## **Disclaimer**

The contents and conclusions of this synthesis report reflect the opinion of the authors and not necessarily those of the United Nations, OCHA, donors, or other stakeholders.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This inter-agency synthesis provides a consolidated analysis of the humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis from 2022 to 2024. Commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG), it draws on existing evaluations, operational reviews, and learning reports to inform strategic learning and collective accountability. It aims to support humanitarian actors in Ukraine as they undertake a strategic Humanitarian Reset and offers relevant lessons for future large-scale responses in similarly complex, government-led contexts.
2. Rather than carrying out a full evaluation, this synthesis of evaluative evidence on the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine draws on findings, conclusions, and recommendations from completed evaluations as well as other evaluative studies by humanitarian actors to assess to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, use of national capacities, and coordination of the collective response. Additional stakeholder interviews were utilised to complement documentary analysis where evidence was limited or fragmented. The synthesis employs an analytical framework aligned with system-wide learning priorities and humanitarian evaluation standards.

### Background

3. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered mass displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and one of the most complex humanitarian crises in recent decades. In response, the humanitarian system activated the system-wide scale-up protocols and expanded, involving over 500 partners and activating multiple clusters. Humanitarian needs varied considerably over the following years, influenced by the ongoing conflict, reducing humanitarian space, and shifting donor priorities.

### Key findings

#### Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People

4. The collective humanitarian response in Ukraine was largely relevant in addressing the needs of affected populations. Agencies scaled up rapidly and adapted programmes over time, increasingly aligning with shifting needs and access conditions. Large-scale delivery of life-saving assistance, including cash, food, and shelter, enabled millions to avoid, withstand, and recover from the impacts of war.
5. The scale, speed, and complexity of the full-scale invasion and its humanitarian consequences were not fully anticipated, not only by humanitarian agencies but also by other organisations and governments, including the Government of Ukraine. Prior to the invasion, the humanitarian response had mainly focused on eastern Ukraine, leaving the broader humanitarian system underprepared for the rapid escalation and nationwide crisis that ensued. The formal activation of the humanitarian system's scale-up allowed agencies to expand operations and respond swiftly to emerging needs and displacements.

6. At the outset, humanitarian actors recognised the rapidly evolving and unpredictable nature of the crisis, characterised by an uncertain war trajectory, escalating needs, and unclear funding prospects. Response strategies were shaped by both urgent humanitarian imperatives and the need to plan for future transition and exit. Over time, agencies refined their approaches by incorporating contingency planning, protection risks, and beneficiary feedback into programme design.

### Effectiveness of the Response

7. **Operational effectiveness:** The humanitarian response in Ukraine was characterised by rapid and large-scale expansion, supported by flexible funding and strong operational leadership. In the early stages of the crisis, humanitarian actors successfully delivered extensive assistance across multiple sectors, including food, cash, shelter, protection, and child-focused services. This swift mobilisation reached millions and addressed critical needs during a period of uncertainty and upheaval. However, while funding facilitated the initial response, it remained inadequate relative to the scale of needs, and some key sectors, such as food security, livelihoods, WASH, and shelter, were under-resourced. The urgency to disburse funds quickly, though necessary, sometimes resulted in gaps in planning, risk management, and oversight. Access difficulties, particularly in areas outside government control, further constrained coverage and highlighted systemic limitations that remain relevant for future large-scale or contested responses.
8. **Principled and Inclusive Response:** Humanitarian actors consistently expressed a strong normative commitment to the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. These principles guided the overall approach, particularly in the early phase, when a ‘no-regrets’ strategy prioritised rapid coverage to alleviate suffering. While this enabled scale, it sometimes came at the expense of refined targeting, limiting the ability to prioritise those most at risk fully. The application of humanitarian principles was further challenged by the highly politicised environment, access restrictions, and complex relationships with state and non-state actors. Inclusion and equity were uneven across the response: while significant efforts were made to document human rights violations and engage with national systems, operational initiatives to support marginalised groups—such as persons with disabilities, older people, and ethnic minorities—varied considerably. The experience underscores the importance of embedding principled decision-making, intersectional analysis, and inclusive targeting from the outset, even in high-pressure contexts.

### Transition and Sustainability

9. Evidence indicates some progress in connecting humanitarian aid to recovery and resilience. The collective response showed a generally positive but uneven advance towards integrating humanitarian efforts with resilience and reconstruction initiatives. Most agencies incorporated elements of recovery planning, with several establishing practical or normative links to longer-term outcomes. However, the absence of a shared nexus strategy, inconsistent operationalisation across sectors, and poor integration of peacebuilding efforts limited the coherence and sustainability of these efforts. Divergence is also evident in the degree to which

agencies developed structured transition plans and engaged with national recovery frameworks.

### Use of National Capacities and Localisation

10. The collective humanitarian response in Ukraine demonstrated a clear operational commitment to localisation and harnessing national capacities, with national NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), and local authorities mobilised extensively, especially after 2022. Engagement with local actors grew substantially and was crucial in providing assistance, particularly in frontline areas. However, this engagement was often reactive and driven by immediate delivery needs rather than a long-term strategic vision for a locally led response. Many national NGOs had longstanding coordination experience and partnerships established since 2014, yet these pre-existing structures were not fully recognised or incorporated. National NGOs were largely confined to operational roles, with limited influence over decision-making, coordination, or transition planning. Capacity-strengthening efforts were fragmented and not embedded in broader localisation strategies. In the early stages, international actors frequently set up parallel systems, and donor funding modalities continued to favour international organisations, limiting direct support to national actors. Consequently, opportunities to capitalise on Ukraine's strong civil society and decentralised governance framework were not fully realised.
11. The formal coordination architecture, particularly the cluster system, was not fully adapted to Ukraine's institutional context. While coordination mechanisms enabled scale and alignment among international actors, they did not meaningfully include a broad spectrum of national CSOs—particularly informal or emerging groups—in the early stages of the response. Over time, progress was made toward local co-leadership and greater alignment with area-based coordination models, particularly at sub-national levels. Nonetheless, persistent power asymmetries and the dominance of international actors limited strategic influence for local partners. The ongoing disconnect between the global coordination model and Ukraine's national systems constrained the coherence, inclusiveness, and sustainability of the response. Addressing these structural barriers—through adapted coordination approaches, flexible funding, and strategic partnership frameworks—remains essential for enabling a more locally led and nationally anchored humanitarian architecture.

### Coordination and System Coherence

12. While the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) outlined broad strategic objectives, the IASC coordination system in Ukraine faced challenges in translating these into coherent and collective operational planning. At both inter-agency and cluster levels, there was no formal framework for area-based coordination, shared outcomes, or joint planning—particularly in relation to nexus efforts linking humanitarian action with recovery and development. This gap limited the system's ability to align operational delivery with evolving national priorities and localised needs.
13. Although most clusters maintained engagement with relevant government departments and ministries, the absence of a clear transition strategy delayed the handover of coordination

responsibilities to national actors. A more deliberate and early emphasis on co-leadership and integration with national systems could have enhanced ownership, reduced duplication, and supported a more sustainable coordination model from the outset.

14. Many clusters demonstrated strong technical capacity and delivered services at scale. However, this did not always translate into inclusive leadership or strategic integration across clusters. Opportunities to strengthen cross-sectoral planning and ensure a progressive transition towards nationally led coordination were often missed, which reinforced parallel systems rather than fostering alignment with existing structures.
15. Operational coordination among agencies was inconsistent. Although there were instances of effective partnerships and collaborative efforts, gaps remained in joint assessments, strategic alignment, and coherence across inter-agency mechanisms. The absence of consistent joint planning limited opportunities for synergies, and inter-agency coordination was often driven by operational necessity rather than a shared strategy. Enhancing internal coherence and integrating shared outcome planning are critical areas for further improvement as the response progresses.

## Conclusions

16. The Ukraine response highlighted both the strengths and limitations of standard humanitarian models when applied in politically complex, government-led contexts. While the international system demonstrated its capacity for rapid mobilisation and large-scale delivery, particularly in the early stages of the 2022 escalation, models built for fragile state environments did not fully align with the operational realities of a functioning government, strong civil society, and decentralised governance structures.
17. Millions received food, shelter, protection, and cash aid. However, the response was more successful in meeting immediate needs than in supporting strategic transition, sustainability, or systemic integration. Continued reliance on in-kind modalities, fragmented coordination, and limited engagement of national actors in planning and governance limited long-term impact and local ownership.
18. Ukraine's experience highlights the importance of adjusting humanitarian models to better suit government-led, middle-income settings. Although localisation advanced in operational delivery, strategic leadership, funding access, and coordination continued to be dominated by international actors. Promising alternatives, such as area-based coordination and national co-leadership, appeared but were not consistently expanded. Opportunities to integrate humanitarian aid into national systems were often overlooked, restricting coherence and sustainability.
19. Operationally, the response often outpaced systems designed to ensure equity, inclusion, and accountability. Protection was not consistently mainstreamed, and coordination structures frequently remained inaccessible to local actors. While cash programming expanded rapidly, it lacked a shared vision for integration into social protection systems, leaving its transformative potential unrealised. Looking ahead, enhanced preparedness, principled action, and meaningful investment in national leadership and coordination will be vital to deliver more inclusive, effective, and contextually appropriate responses.

## Recommendations

20. The ongoing Humanitarian Reset of the humanitarian response in Ukraine offers a vital chance to address these issues. A revised approach should emphasise local leadership, strategic integration with national systems, and clearer routes from emergency relief to sustainable recovery. The lessons from Ukraine are also broadly applicable to global humanitarian reform efforts, especially in ensuring that collective responses are inclusive, accountable, and appropriate for the context.
21. The specific recommendations are:
  1. Adapt coordination models through the Reset process to ensure they are fully aligned with Ukraine's context and operational realities.
  2. Advance localisation by moving from service delivery roles to shared decision-making and leadership with national actors.
  3. Prioritise and support national leadership within coordination structures to strengthen ownership and sustainability.
  4. Re-establish strategic coherence by setting collective goals, defining common outcomes, and agreeing on clear priorities.
  5. Embed transition and sustainability planning into sector strategies to support long-term recovery and resilience.
  6. Ensure humanitarian principles, protection and Accountability to Affected People are systematically upheld across all aspects of the Ukraine response.
  7. Strengthen shared, secure and interoperable data systems.

# Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
Table of Contents .....	8
SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION.....	10
1.1 Purpose and Scope.....	10
1.2 Approach and Methodology.....	10
1.3 Contextual Factors .....	13
SECTION 2. FINDINGS.....	17
2.1 RELEVANCE .....	17
2.1.1. Scale-up and Adaptive Capacity .....	19
2.1.2. Needs and Data.....	21
2.1.3. Response Design.....	23
2.1.4. Security at Operational Level.....	25
2.1.5. Civil Society Engagement.....	26
2.2 EFFECTIVENESS .....	28
2.2.1. Effectiveness of interventions.....	28
2.2.2. Equity, Inclusion, Human Rights.....	32
2.2.3. Enabling/Inhibiting Factors .....	33
2.2.4. Humanitarian Access in Ukraine: Challenges and Efforts.....	35
2.2.5. Humanitarian Principles .....	37
2.2.6. Cross-cutting Issues.....	40
2.3 SUSTAINABILITY.....	43
2.3.1. Nexus approach – Linking humanitarian response to resilience and reconstruction .....	43
2.3.2. Engagement with Government and National Systems .....	44
2.4 PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCALISATION .....	47
2.4.1. Partnerships and Localisation .....	47
2.4.2. Use and Integration of Local Response Capacities .....	49
2.4.3. Systemic Fit of Cluster Coordination with Ukrainian Civil Society.....	51
2.5 COORDINATION.....	53
2.5.1. Internal coherence .....	53
2.5.2. The cluster system.....	54
2.5.3. Operational coordination .....	54



2.5.4. Joint advocacy.....	55
SECTION 3. CONCLUSIONS .....	56
High-level implications for humanitarian action .....	56
Strategic implications .....	56
Operational implications .....	58
SECTION 4. LESSONS .....	59
SECTION 6. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	60
Six Key Recommendations for the HCT – Towards a Strategic Reset of the Humanitarian Response in Ukraine.....	60
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	62
ANNEXES.....	65
Annex A. Terms of Reference .....	65
Annex B. Analytical Framework .....	65
Annex C. List of Evaluated Reports and Data Sources .....	65
Annex D. Methodology and Limitations .....	65
Annex E. Figures and Tables .....	65
Annex F. List of Stakeholders Interviewed .....	65
Annex G. Additional information on Cash-Based Assistance .....	65

## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

22. The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG), an entity associated with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), initially commissioned an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the humanitarian response in Ukraine, in line with the IASC Scale-Up Protocols. However, due to ongoing security risks, the rapidly evolving context, and the high operational workload of humanitarian actors on the ground, the IAHE SG decided in June 2023 to conduct a Synthesis of Evaluative Evidence instead.
23. This Synthesis of Evaluative Evidence on the Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as the "synthesis") is designed to meet the collective learning needs of the humanitarian response in Ukraine. Rather than a full-scale IAHE, the synthesis draws from completed agency evaluations, mostly centralized corporate emergency evaluations, to provide an evidence-based assessment of response efforts, challenges and lessons learned.
24. The synthesis is conducted under the auspices of the IAHE SG, which is chaired by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and composed of Evaluation Directors from IASC member organizations. An Inter-Agency Management Group (MG) has been established to oversee and manage the synthesis process.

### 1.1 Purpose and Scope

25. The objective of the synthesis, as outlined in the Terms of Reference (TORs) (Annex A), is to map the existing evaluative evidence from IASC members regarding the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, synthesize key findings and lessons based on the criteria and questions, and provide actionable recommendations for improving the collective humanitarian response in Ukraine and the humanitarian system as a whole.
26. Given the sensitive political environment and the challenges of aggregating results across diverse evaluations, the synthesis focused on generating lessons and actionable insights while considering collective accountability as outlined in the TORS.

### 1.2 Approach and Methodology

27. This synthesis provides a structured analysis of the collective humanitarian response in Ukraine, drawing solely on existing evaluative evidence produced by humanitarian agencies. It is not a new evaluation, but rather a meta-level analysis that consolidates, triangulates and interprets findings from evaluations, operational reviews and learning papers to inform system-wide learning. The synthesis followed the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Evaluation Synthesis Guidance, detailing the methods, sources and analytical framework.
28. The synthesis is guided by an analytical framework (Annex B), structured around five core synthesis questions (SQs) addressing relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, partnerships /

localisation, and coordination. (see Table 1) Sub-questions accompanied each of these main questions and guided the analysis and synthesis of the relevant evaluation and learning reports.

**29. Table 2: Synthesis Criteria and Questions**

Criteria	Questions
IASC Collective Response in Ukraine: Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People	<b>SQ 1:</b> How well does the evidence show that the collective IASC response in Ukraine since 2022 has served the best interests (short and longer-term) of vulnerable people? (Specifically, to what extent has it enabled them to avoid, withstand and recover from threats to their well-being and security?)
IASC Collective Response in Ukraine: Results Achieved for Vulnerable Groups	<b>SQ 2:</b> To what extent does the evidence find that IASC members' collective efforts were able to effectively respond to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, especially in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable?
Transition Towards Recovery Oriented Response and a More Resilient Community	<b>SQ 3:</b> To what extent has the collective contributed to transitioning toward a recovery-oriented response and a more resilient country/ community?
Utilisation of National Capacities to Deliver Assistance at Scale	<b>SQ 4:</b> To what extent does the evidence find that the collective response in Ukraine made use of available national capacities, including local actors and partnerships, to deliver assistance to affected people?
IASC Coordination Model in Ukraine and its Operational Delivery	<b>SQ 5:</b> To what extent do evaluations find the co-ordination model in Ukraine fit for purpose in the context? To what extent did it support operational delivery?

30. The SQs remained unchanged from the TOR. The exception is the sustainability question, which has been adjusted to focus on the transition towards recovery and resilience. The analytical framework, developed during the Inception Phase, enabled systematic data extraction and analysis, applying a primarily deductive approach while allowing inductive coding to capture emergent themes and unforeseen patterns across diverse sources.
31. Eligible documents were selected based on defined criteria and categorised into a typology of evaluative evidence (Annex C). Central to the synthesis are five centralised evaluation reports from five UN agencies (IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and OHCHR), prioritised for their methodological rigour and robust quality assurance. These are complemented by seven thematic or decentralised evaluations, five operational reviews and learning products offering

contextualised insights and real-time reflections. Multi-country evaluations were only included when Ukraine-specific findings were clearly delineated. Reports not meeting evaluation criteria – such as workshop notes or background papers – were excluded. The synthesis did not include an assessment of the performance of the HC or OCHA, as no evaluation of their roles during the emergency phase was available for review. This represents a notable gap in relation to system-wide leadership and coordination, which could not be addressed within the scope and methodology of this exercise.

32. Each centralized evaluation included in the synthesis covered a different temporal scope.<sup>1</sup> This variation in temporal scope also applies to the other documents used in the synthesis. Unless otherwise specified, the evidence refers to national coverage or the entire country operation; specific geographic references are noted where relevant.
33. The synthesis applied a qualitative data analysis (QDA) approach supported by tools including Airtable and Excel. Documents were coded thematically against the framework, with triangulation ensured through comparative analysis. Analytical tools such as summary text extractions and cross-occurrence matrix were used to explore intersections between issues and to synthesise findings across evaluations.
34. Through this structured and transparent methodology, the synthesis sought to distil cross-cutting lessons and key insights, supporting collective reflection and improvement across the humanitarian system in Ukraine.
35. The synthesis of evaluative evidence is based on existing evaluation reports, operational reviews, and secondary sources rather than primary data collection. While this limits direct ethical risks, the synthesis process adhered to key ethical principles to ensure integrity, credibility and responsible information use, including Do No Harm, Confidentiality and Data Protection, Respect for Stakeholders, Transparency and Integrity, and Independence and Objectivity.
36. During the inception and reporting phases, the synthesis team conducted additional interviews with a range of stakeholders (see Annex F). These interviews were purposefully undertaken to complement the analysis of existing documentation and provide forward-looking reflection. While not intended to fill evidence gaps, the interviews were used to deepen understanding in areas where the documentary evidence was limited or fragmented, particularly regarding system-level coordination and the engagement of national stakeholders – such as government entities and national civil society organizations (CSOs) – in the humanitarian response. The interviews helped clarify nuances, validated emerging findings, and offered insights on opportunities for strengthening future collective action.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF 12 January 2021 to 6 March 2023; WFP 1 October 2022 to 30 June 2024; UNHCR 1 January 2022 to 1 March 2024; IOM 10 January 2022 to 30 March 2023; OHCHR 1 May 2021 to 31 December 2023.

37. The synthesis process faced several methodological and evidentiary limitations stemming from the diversity of evaluation and learning sources. Evaluations varied widely in their approaches, definitions, indicators and timeframes, making cross-report comparisons challenging. For instance, differing interpretations of key concepts such as localisation and inconsistent use of indicators preclude quantitative aggregation. In addition, the temporal and geographic scope of evaluations varied significantly, with stronger coverage of the early response and 2023, while other periods were underrepresented. Some evaluations also lacked an exclusive focus on Ukraine, requiring selective extraction of relevant content.
38. Moreover, the representation of evaluative evidence was uneven with a strong presence of centralised evaluations from United Nations agencies, but limited availability of NGO-generated evidence. Evidence on system-level coordination – particularly during the early response phase and under the area-based coordination model – was limited, with most evaluations offering insights only into agency-level coordination. To help address these gaps, the synthesis team conducted additional interviews with government representatives at central (1 KII) and oblast (3 KII) levels, national CSOs (4 KIIs) and United Nations agencies (7 KIIs).

### 1.3 Contextual Factors<sup>2</sup>

39. The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine was triggered by the large-scale military offensive launched on 24 February 2022. It represents the largest conventional war in Europe since World War II. This is a conflict between two sovereign states – one a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council – with vast military forces, trench warfare along expansive frontlines, and active combat in and around urban centres, energy infrastructure, and even nuclear facilities. The combination of intense military operations, large-scale displacement, and destruction of critical civilian infrastructure has created one of the most complex and multi-dimensional humanitarian responses of the past decade.
40. From the outset, the humanitarian security situation deteriorated rapidly. Millions of lives were affected with significant civilian casualties, widespread psychosocial trauma, and the destruction of critical infrastructure, including housing, schools and hospitals. Civilians have endured long periods without access to electricity, heating, water or medical care, particularly in areas close to the frontlines. The scale and complexity of the crisis prompted the IASC to activate a System-Wide Scale-Up, which was deactivated one year later. The United Nations launched a Flash Appeal on 1 March 2022, seeking US\$ 4.3 billion to assist 11.5 million people. The appeal was 88.6 percent<sup>3</sup> funded and focused on three strategic objectives:
- Providing timely, lifesaving multisectoral assistance, incorporating feedback and ensuring inclusivity regarding gender, age and diversity.

<sup>2</sup> The context section has been updated from the version included in the Terms of Reference (TORs) to reflect the latest available data and recent developments in the humanitarian response in Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Ukraine Flash Appeal (March to December 2022). Financials. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1102/financials#page-title>

- Protecting war-affected individuals and civilian infrastructure and advocating for adherence to international humanitarian law.
  - Supporting essential, gender-responsive services tailored to community needs in war-impacted and host areas.
41. An Operational Peer Review (OPR) mission from 19 March to 1 April 2023 enabled reflection on early lessons and adaptations to the response, and provided the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and HCT an opportunity to assess and improve the response.
42. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) identified 17.6 million people in need – 49 percent of the population – a significant increase from the 3 million before the invasion. Of the 11.1 million targeted, 56 percent were women, 27 percent children, 22 percent elderly, and 15 percent persons with disabilities. The US\$ 3.5 billion financial requirement was 72.2 percent funded. The HRP's strategic objectives were:
- Provide principled and timely multisectoral lifesaving assistance to internally displaced people, non-displaced people and returnees, ensuring their safety and dignity.
  - Enable access to basic services for internally displaced, non-displaced and returnees.
43. In 2024, the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) required US\$ 3.1 billion to assist 8.5 million people – 22 percent of Ukraine's population – including 32 percent women, 24 percent children, 24 percent elderly, and 13 percent persons with disabilities. The response was 77 percent funded. The strategic objectives remained consistent with those of 2023.<sup>4</sup>
44. In 2025, the initial HNRP required US\$ 2.63 billion to assist 6 million people (out of 12.7 million people in need) – 16.7 percent of Ukraine's population. In April 2025, the Re-prioritized HNRP reduced the required funding to US\$ 1.75 billion to assist 4.8 million people.<sup>5</sup> Strategic priorities remain, but with a stronger emphasis on the most vulnerable – particularly women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups such as Roma – and a stronger emphasis on reaching those in areas with the highest severity of needs and displacement. The response strategy increasingly integrated immediate needs with longer-term resilience.
45. Throughout, efforts aimed to align the humanitarian response with national systems and with central and local governments involved in coordination. There was a strong commitment to Cash-based Assistance – Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) and Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) – consistent with Grand Bargain commitments. Cross-cutting priorities included Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Age, Gender, Diversity (AGD) and disability inclusion, as well as Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> OCHA. Ukraine. HNRP. 2024. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1177/financials#page-title>

<sup>5</sup> OCHA. Ukraine. Re-prioritization HNRP. April 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/addendum-re-prioritization-ukraine-2025-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-april-2025-enuk>

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

46. The HCT, led by the HC/Resident Coordinator (HC/RC), included United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), CSOs, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) representatives. The humanitarian response was coordinated through 15 clusters and involved 543 operational partners, including 342 national NGOs, 143 international NGOs (INGOs), 16 government actors and 13 United Nations agencies. Key sectors with the largest funding requirements included Food Security and Livelihoods, Protection, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA), and Shelter and Non-food Items (NFIs).
47. Before February 2022, Ukraine had made progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), despite gaps in gender equality and social protection. The war reversed many gains, heightening human rights risks, especially for women and girls facing increased gender-based violence (GBV), as well as the elderly, persons with disabilities, children and adolescents, ethnic minorities, prisoners of war, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.<sup>7</sup>
48. As of October 2024, 6.8 million Ukrainian refugees were registered globally (92 percent in Europe), while 3.6 million remained internally displaced. Another 12.6 million people, though not displaced, have been directly affected by the war due to the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure and limited access to services.<sup>8</sup>
49. At the time of writing the synthesis in mid-2025, the global humanitarian landscape has changed significantly. Humanitarian funding is under increasing strain amid competing global crises and changes in domestic priorities among key humanitarian donors. This has affected the scale and sustainability of international responses, including in Ukraine. At the same time, geopolitical dynamics have evolved, particularly in the United States. This has introduced new uncertainties regarding multilateral cooperation, funding priorities and global engagement in conflict-affected contexts. These pressures have not only constrained the ability to maintain large-scale operations but have also impacted the continuity of service delivery. As some agencies scale down or exit, there are growing gaps in meeting regular and ongoing needs, placing an increasing burden on the remaining humanitarian actors to fill critical service and protection roles.
50. Despite these shifts, the findings and lessons emerging from the synthesis remain relevant. They offer critical insights for ongoing and future humanitarian planning, highlighting adaptable approaches, persistent challenges and opportunities to strengthen collective action. Moreover, the synthesis also serves an important accountability function.

---

<sup>7</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (A/HRC/52/62), 15 March 2023.

<sup>8</sup> OCHA. Ukraine. HNR. 2025. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1271/article/ukraine-hnrp-2025>





## SECTION 2. FINDINGS

51. Findings are organized according to synthesis questions, aligning with the analytical framework.

### 2.1 IASC Collective Response in Ukraine: Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People

**SQ 1:** How well does the evidence show that the collective IASC response in Ukraine since 2022 has served the best interests (short and longer-term) of vulnerable people? [Specifically, to what extent has it enabled them to avoid, withstand and recover from threats to their well-being and security?]

52. **Finding:** The combined evaluative evidence affirms that the collective IASC response in Ukraine – based on the evaluation reports reviewed - was broadly relevant in addressing vulnerable populations' immediate needs and in positioning systems for longer-term recovery, accountability and peace. Agencies contributed to this not only by delivering life-saving assistance at scale, but also by using data to inform programme design, developing strategic partnerships and adjusting approaches in response to evolving needs. While individual agencies demonstrated strong data systems and adaptive capacities, the weak operational integration and limited interoperability of systems reduced the ability to conduct collective results analysis and weakened overall accountability.

53. Evaluation reports indicate that many agencies maintained strong internal data collection and analysis systems to support their own programming. However, these efforts remained largely siloed, with limited integration or harmonisation across agencies. As noted in multiple evaluations, this fragmentation made it difficult to aggregate or analyse results at the cluster level, despite improvements in coordination structures. The absence of harmonised results frameworks, shared indicators, and interoperable information systems hindered the humanitarian system's ability to present a coherent picture of collective outcomes. This, in turn, limited the ability to report on shared goals or demonstrate overall impact, constraining accountability to both affected populations and donors..

54. The World Food Programme (WFP) was found to play a central role in Ukraine's food security and cash response, becoming the largest provider of Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) in Ukraine in 2022 and 2023 while also maintaining a significant in-kind footprint. Although cash transfers were deployed from the outset, the share of in-kind assistance remained high, reflecting operational constraints, pre-positioned food stocks, and market access concerns. As market functionality improved and beneficiary preference for cash grew stronger, WFP expanded CBTs and reduced in-kind distributions, while also increasing its use of sectoral cash-based transfers (CBT). This evolution reflects both the scale of the early operational challenges and WFP's capacity to pivot its modality mix in response to changing conditions.

55. WFP supported national food systems through local procurement, CBTs and measures to limit market disruption from food aid imports. In partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), WFP launched efforts to bring mine affected agricultural land back into production in the Kharkiv oblast, with plans to expand to Mykolaiv oblast. WFP also partnered with Fondation Suisse de Déminage to assess the presence of Explosive Remnants of War and to clear lands enabling small farmers and rural families to restart food production and restore livelihoods. These efforts reflect WFP's shift from emergency response to recovery-focused support.
56. In the early stages of the response, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) rapidly scaled up operations in western and central Ukraine, prioritising a blanket approach to supply distributions and humanitarian cash transfers to support displaced populations. This approach enabled UNICEF to reach large numbers of people on the move during a highly fluid and uncertain phase of the crisis. Initiatives such as the Spilno Centre Network provided an important platform for partners to deliver basic services to children and families across multiple locations. As the situation evolved, rapid population movements and limited initial data posed challenges for timely targeting and monitoring. Over time, UNICEF strengthened its field presence and needs assessments, which supported a more refined and partnership-based approach to identifying and addressing specific vulnerabilities.
57. The crisis in the frontline oblasts in the east and south caused extensive damage to urban centres, where the destruction of civilian infrastructure severely disrupted essential services such as health care, education, water, and protection. In the early stages of the response, UNICEF's programming was more limited in these high-need areas, reflecting both access constraints and the initial focus on regions with large numbers of displaced people. As the crisis evolved and population needs intensified in the east and south, UNICEF decentralised its operations by opening field offices and scaling up staffing in affected regions. In the latter phase of the scale-up, UNICEF expanded its engagement in these areas, including support for infrastructure rehabilitation and more targeted service delivery through partnerships with local actors.
58. DRC's relevance in responding to needs improved over time after programmes shifted to the east, south and north, and became more context-specific, addressing reconstruction and return in stabilised areas and acute basic needs in areas highly impacted by the war. This adaptive approach better aligned with the evolving needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and government priorities.
59. Evaluations show that aid provided as part of the collective response enabled vulnerable people and war-affected communities to avoid, withstand and recover from threats to their well-being and security. The humanitarian support from the collective response – adequate food and water supplies, emergency health and protection services, as well as cash assistance – helped them withstand and recover from threats to their well-being.

60. UNICEF's WASH section rapidly scaled up in response to increased shelling and damage to water infrastructure, providing water trucking and bottled water in coordination with the WASH Cluster. Some supply mismatches occurred but were resolved as local procurement improved. UNICEF also supported local health facilities through mobile health teams and contingency medical stocks to maintain primary health and trauma care services.
61. UNHCR focused on providing shelter, food and other basic needs to war-affected communities. In 2023, UNHCR placed greater emphasis on strengthening the quality of its interventions and achieved an effective and timely scale-up of its MPCA. Through its diverse partnerships, the Agency also delivered protection services with the GBV programme operating in both rural and urban areas and the Child Protection programme focussing largely on rural areas and communities with less access to humanitarian hubs.

### 2.1.1. Scale-up and Adaptive Capacity

62. **Finding:** The scale, speed and complexity of the full-scale invasion and its humanitarian consequences were not fully anticipated, not only by the humanitarian actors but also other organizations and governments, including the Government of Ukraine. Prior to the invasion, the humanitarian response had been primarily focused on eastern Ukraine, leaving the wider humanitarian system underprepared for the rapid escalation and nationwide crisis that followed. Following the invasion, the formal activation<sup>9</sup> of the humanitarian system's scale-up enabled agencies to rapidly expand operations and respond to emerging needs and displacements.
63. The centralised evaluations and the IASC OPR report consistently note that the international humanitarian system, including IASC and HCT member agencies, had not anticipated the scale or geographic spread of the war. This lack of anticipation was compounded by a pre-invasion operational focus on two oblasts in the east, which shaped preparedness efforts around a more localised conflict scenario. Agencies such as WFP, IFRC, HRMMU, and UNICEF acknowledged in their evaluations that the escalation and breadth of needs exceeded planning assumptions.
64. **In 2019, recognising the evolving dynamics, the HCT reviewed the cluster coordination architecture and encouraged clusters to begin considering transition planning.** Clusters

---

<sup>9</sup> The IASC "Scale-Up activation is a system-wide mobilization in response to a sudden-onset, or significantly deteriorating, humanitarian crisis, where the capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver assistance and protection does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis. The procedure activates agreed IASC mechanisms and tools to ensure that the system delivers at speed and effectively in support of national authorities and in situ capacity, and closely monitors the performance of the response." The IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up protocols replaced the 2012 IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation ("L3 Response") on 20 November 2018. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda/content/iasc-humanitarian-system-wide-scale-protocols-released>

Since each agency has its own activation protocols and timelines, activation dates in Ukraine (in 2022) varied, as follows: WHO (24 February); OCHA and UNHCR (25 February); WFP (27 February); UNICEF (5 March); FAO (8 March); and IOM (28 March).

were asked to draft or update transition plans that would define benchmarks for transition, outline coordination modalities post-transition, and identify required capacity-building efforts. While these early discussions reflected forward-looking intent, the HCT concluded at the time that conditions were not yet conducive for complete transition. As a result, planning efforts remained incomplete and did not translate into readiness for a rapid system-wide shift when the full-scale war occurred. The emphasis remained on coordination within eastern Ukraine, reinforcing a subnational focus that proved insufficient for the national scale of the 2022 crisis.

65. The sudden onset of full-scale war, marked by mass displacement, rapidly shifting frontlines, and escalating humanitarian needs, posed significant operational challenges. However, agencies demonstrated a high degree of adaptability. Those with an existing presence in Ukraine, flexible operational systems, and the ability to decentralise decision-making were generally better positioned to adjust targeting, modalities, and geographic coverage in real-time. Evaluation evidence shows that decentralised operational structures and strong national partnerships facilitated quicker adaptation to the rapidly changing context.
66. Evaluation findings indicate that, in the early phase of the response, accurately identifying the most vulnerable populations proved challenging. This resulted in inclusion and exclusion errors, particularly where rapid scale-up outpaced targeting systems and contextual understanding. Weaknesses in feedback and complaints mechanisms further limited agencies' ability to adjust programmes in real time to the needs of affected people.
67. Despite these early challenges, most agencies demonstrated adaptability as the context evolved. They adjusted operational capacities in response to changing access conditions, shifting needs, and service delivery gaps. Examples include the transition from enrolment centres to one-stop, multi-purpose service hubs, and the adoption of remote monitoring modalities when areas became inaccessible. These adaptations helped improve responsiveness and coverage over time, although some gaps in vulnerability targeting and monitoring persisted.
68. **Delayed activation processes and preparedness gaps affected the early response.** Several humanitarian actors experienced delays in initiating full-scale operations due to internal staffing constraints, limited pre-2022 operational presence in Ukraine, and a lack of pre-positioned emergency supplies. In some cases, internal procedural changes affected the speed of emergency activation, though this was mitigated by in-country presence, proximity of regional stocks, and the ability to quickly mobilise funding. In other instances, while the potential humanitarian impact of a full-scale escalation had been analysed in advance, the actual scale and complexity of the emergency exceeded planning assumptions. This created challenges in the early stages of the scale-up. Over time, humanitarian actors adapted their geographical footprint and reoriented their operational models to better respond to shifting needs and contextual dynamics.
69. **Supply chain, logistics and access constraints posed early challenges to scaling up the response.** Fragmented supply systems, procurement delays, access restrictions, and

bureaucratic barriers all hindered the speed and efficiency of early operations. In the initial months, establishing large-scale logistics capabilities required rapidly building supply chains from the ground up—often in the absence of pre-existing frameworks. Key challenges included mobilising flexible funding, recruiting skilled staff, identifying vendors and transporters, signing field-level agreements, and navigating administrative procedures to import humanitarian goods. Delays in import approvals and contractor reluctance to operate near active conflict zones further disrupted early delivery, with some shipments initially stalled at border points. Despite these constraints, actors with prior operational presence and established relationships with national and local authorities were able to scale up more quickly. Access to pre-positioned stocks in regional hubs, contextual familiarity, and rapid donor mobilisation contributed to more flexible and timely responses in hard-to-reach areas. Within a matter of weeks, humanitarian actors established field bases in western Ukraine and progressively expanded their operational footprint as the full scale and geographic spread of the crisis became clearer.

70. **Staffing and human resource constraints affected early operational capacity across the response.** Humanitarian actors faced challenges in rapidly recruiting and deploying staff with the appropriate technical expertise, contextual knowledge, and operational experience, particularly in securing qualified national staff. These constraints led to gaps in field presence, coordination, and monitoring during the initial scale-up phase. In some cases, international surge deployments filled immediate needs, but did not always align with requirements in terms of technical profiles, seniority, security awareness, or knowledge of the local context. For actors without a recent or continuous operational presence in Ukraine, the absence of established country offices, staffing rosters, or national recruitment pipelines posed additional challenges. Building national teams took longer than anticipated, though improvements in staffing structures, gender balance, and staff care were reported over time. Organisations with pre-existing structures or relationships in Ukraine, including local and national actors, were at times better positioned to mobilise rapidly—though they too experienced limitations in terms of staff numbers, branch capacity, and technical depth, particularly in responding to a crisis of this scale. Across the system, gaps in monitoring capacity were frequently noted, and reliance on third-party monitoring was a key interim measure. While staffing levels improved over time, many teams remained under-resourced during the scale-up period, impacting coverage and oversight in some locations.

### 2.1.2. Needs and Data

71. **Finding:** In the early phase of the response, the absence of coordinated, disaggregated data limited effective targeting and inclusion of vulnerable groups. While agencies employed diverse approaches to address data gaps, inconsistencies and ad hoc methods hindered equitable and evidence-based decision-making. Disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, the elderly, and minorities was often missing or inconsistently collected. Although data systems and targeting practices improved over time, early shortcomings affected the ability to fully understand and meet the needs of all affected populations.

#### Box 1 The Data Environment in the Ukraine Response

Across the response, agencies faced constraints in accessing timely, detailed or disaggregated data especially in the early stages. While data collection is a shared responsibility across the humanitarian system, the speed and scale of the war, combined with limited pre-existing baseline data and coordination challenges, constrained early efforts. To bridge gaps, agencies drew on a mix of internal assessments and inter-agency tools; however, the quality and granularity of these sources varied, especially in relation to vulnerable groups.

A key success in the Ukraine response was the early and effective use of the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA). Available already in 2022, the MSNA was used extensively by multiple clusters and agencies to inform planning and targeting. Although not designed to replace detailed sector-specific assessments, the MSNA provided a robust, transparent, and commonly accepted dataset that enabled inter-sectoral comparisons and improved coordination. This represented a notable efficiency gain and strengthened the evidence base across the response.

72. Different agencies employed a variety of assessment and monitoring approaches to inform their operations, each with strengths and limitations. A few examples are included to illustrate the diversity of approaches and associated challenges. WFP adopted its Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators (CARI) methodology to guide its food security analysis and collaborated with REACH for data collection. While this approach enabled timely reporting, it did not benefit from the broader legitimacy and shared ownership that consensus-based, inter-agency assessments typically offer.
73. Despite monitoring systems being in place, the accuracy of results was influenced by the quality and consistency of data inputs. UNHCR partner-reported data, in particular, showed variability at times, as noted in audits covering non-food items (NFIs), collective sites, and cash assistance. Nevertheless, efforts were made to strengthen data systems over time. A range of tools and methodologies, including qualitative approaches, were employed to disaggregate data and better identify vulnerable and at-risk populations. These systems evolved progressively as the response matured and as partner capacity and operational reach expanded.
74. IOM utilised its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to gather real-time data on population movements, needs, and service gaps. This contributed significantly to improved targeting and was also instrumental in informing humanitarian proposals, reporting, and inter-agency exercises such as the Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Despite differences in approaches, these agency-specific systems collectively supported the evidence base for the response, even as gaps in harmonisation and data interoperability persisted.
75. **Comprehensive analyses of needs of vulnerable groups:** Sector-wide assessments like MSNAs allowed for broader comparisons, but granular sectoral data, especially on vulnerable groups, was limited.
76. Humanitarian actors made efforts to adapt programming in response to evolving local conditions and partner feedback. However, gaps remained in systematically linking accountability to affected people (AAP) with programmatic decision-making. In the early phase

of the response, many interventions were shaped more by secondary data and coordination with government counterparts than by direct community engagement, limiting alignment with actual needs. AAP mechanisms varied in quality and coverage, with some sectors demonstrating stronger evidence-to-action links than others.

77. As the response progressed, investments increasingly focused on improving the quality, reach, and targeting of assistance—particularly in protection-related programming. There was a gradual shift toward more structured approaches that reflected emerging risks and needs, with some actors beginning to prioritise recovery-oriented and solutions programming by 2023. Opportunities to scale up assistance were identified in response to contextual enablers, such as population mobility and digital access, which supported more adaptive delivery modalities.
78. **Targeting the needs of vulnerable groups:** Most agencies made efforts to identify and reach vulnerable populations, but the effectiveness of targeting was mixed due to operational constraints, misaligned modalities or geographic gaps. Some illustrative examples include:
  79. WFP provided assistance to both moderately and severely food-insecure populations and its school feeding programme reached vulnerable children. However, operational constraints in areas near the frontlines limited access to those most at risk. In response, WFP introduced double entitlements as an adaptive measure to help overcome access challenges and extend support to hard-to-reach populations.
  80. UNHCR's protection programming played an important role in facilitating access to support vulnerable IDPs, war-affected populations, and, over time, returnee communities in government-controlled areas. In the months following the full-scale invasion, efforts were made to organise and adapt protection responses in line with emerging risks and evolving needs. Throughout 2022, and increasingly in 2023, resources were directed toward improving the quality and reach of protection services, with a gradual shift towards recovery and solutions-oriented programming observed.
  81. UNICEF's early programming prioritised national coverage, focusing on areas receiving large numbers of IDPs and those along key movement corridors. This approach reflected the initial concern with rapid population movements and the widespread impact of the conflict, as much of the population was considered to be affected.
  82. IOM demonstrated a tailored approach, using community surveys to respond directly to IDP needs. For example, in eastern Ukraine, IOM addressed specific winterisation needs (e.g. heaters, boilers), showing a strong link between localised data and targeted delivery.

### 2.1.3. Response Design

83. **Finding:** At the outset of the crisis, humanitarian actors recognised the rapidly evolving and unpredictable nature of the situation – marked by an uncertain war trajectory, escalating humanitarian needs and unclear funding prospects. Response strategies were shaped by both urgent humanitarian imperatives and the necessity to plan for future transitions and exits.



Agencies progressively refined their strategies, integrating contingency planning, protection risks and beneficiary feedback into programme design.

84. Agencies progressively adapted their strategies to align with evolving needs, although some trade-offs and implementation delays persisted. For instance, WFP's pathway to transition and exit was closely linked to strengthening the shock responsiveness of government systems, particularly social safety nets and protection. UNICEF developed contingency plans based on the possibility of an emergency situation. The agency recognised the volatility of the situation and the increasing threat of war, which would heighten the risk for children, women and vulnerable groups.
85. Several agencies developed contingency plans before the escalation, grounded in multi-hazard risk analyses and tailored to the needs of vulnerable populations. These plans reflected realism about operational capacity and anticipated challenges, such as the need for surge deployment and partner coordination in decentralised response models. However, as noted in the broader evidence on preparedness (see paras 39 and 40), the existence of contingency plans did not always translate into operational readiness. For agencies that lacked such plans, the escalation exposed preparedness gaps, including delays in mobilisation and limited initial coverage. Even among agencies with plans in place, the scale and speed of the escalation tested their ability to adapt and respond effectively, revealing broader system-level constraints in preparedness and early action.
86. In the immediate aftermath of the full-scale invasion, the collective response demonstrated agility in scaling up assistance and aligning with protection risks. For instance, UNHCR delivered a large-scale multisectoral response in 2022 and 2023, initially addressing immediate needs, while seeking to strengthen and reinforce national and local capacity. As the context evolved, UNHCR and partners structured their response in line with developing protection risks and needs. By 2023, the quality and outreach of the protection response was strengthened and there was a greater focus on recovery and solutions programming. UNICEF's contingency plans also identified potential risks and mitigation measures, including immediate human resource needs and surge deployments.
87. HRMMU's strong analytical role offset limited outreach to rights holders. Over time, this evolved into a more structured approach, with agencies increasingly integrating recovery and resilience objectives alongside emergency support. The growing coherence between evolving needs, strategic objectives and resource mobilisation was especially evident in efforts to link humanitarian action with national systems and local capacity strengthening.
88. However, the reach and effectiveness of the collective response varied by geographical area. Limitations in accessing non-government-controlled areas – acknowledged by different agencies – constrained the coverage of some interventions, highlighting an operational gap in relation to national-level coherence.
89. The overall design of the response was needs-based and generally coherent, though not without trade-offs. Humanitarian actors progressively adjusted assistance modalities in response to



contextual changes and beneficiary feedback, albeit with some delays. For instance, while cash-based programming expanded over time, in-kind distributions played a significant role in 2022 and 2023 due to their logistical advantages and the urgency of reaching large populations rapidly. The preference for cash assistance grew over time, as reflected in post-distribution monitoring data, which showed a shift from initial acceptance of in-kind in 2022 to a stronger preference for cash by 2023 and 2024. The continued use of in-kind assistance during that period also reflected donor constraints on the use of funds and contextual limitations, such as disrupted markets. It should be noted that by 2024-2025, WFP and other actors had increasingly shifted to cash where feasible, illustrating adaptability over time.

90. As the response matured, agencies improved their capacity to adapt programmes to emerging needs. Over 2022 and 2023, UNHCR and its partners tailored assistance and protection to meet the specific needs of vulnerable people, including people with disabilities and older people. This was achieved by consistently incorporating AGD appropriate approaches in its data collection and analysis, engagement with affected communities, partnerships with national and international NGOs, and the design of its interventions and programmes. UNICEF experienced some early challenges in detailed response planning, partly due to the scale and pace of the crisis and limited access in certain areas. While programme alignment with evolving needs and decentralised realities varied across locations, there were gradual improvements over time. Positive examples of more integrated and locally responsive programming emerged later in the response, including the Spilno Centre Network, deployment of mobile teams to underserved areas, and support to the Better Care programme. These initiatives indicated growing efforts to strengthen coherence and community engagement within the response.
91. Analytical and monitoring functions also played a key role. HRMMU's human rights monitoring informed legal and accountability bodies, reinforcing coherence with the broader peace and justice agenda. While some focus areas required rebalancing – for example, HRMMU's shift towards war-related violations – adjustments to theories of change maintained the relevance and utility of their response logic.

#### 2.1.4. Security at Operational Level

92. **Finding:** Humanitarian agencies undertook a range of measures to manage operational security in high-risk areas. Some agencies also extended support to implementing partners and introduced duty-of-care measures for staff. These actions contributed to mitigating risks and maintaining access in complex environments. While these efforts helped mitigate risks and sustain access in high-risk areas, implementation was uneven, and there was limited evidence that operational decisions, such as adapting, redirecting, or suspending interventions, were systematically informed by evolving security conditions..
93. Across the humanitarian response, agencies demonstrated a good level of investment in ensuring the physical safety of staff and mitigating security risks for beneficiaries, particularly in high-risk frontline areas. Common risk management measures, including compliance with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) protocols, provision of safety

equipment and tailored site selection strategies, were implemented. United Nations staff benefitted from the mandatory Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) training provided by UNDSS.

94. WFP implemented safety measures to ensure the physical safety of staff by deploying its own field security officers across field locations, who supported not only WFP but other United Nations agencies and NGO partners. This inter-agency security support was particularly valued in insecure oblasts. WFP also provided security support to cooperating partners, who faced elevated risks from operating in frontline areas, by equipping them with personal protective equipment (PPE).
95. Care was evident in mitigating physical risks to beneficiaries with the selection of distribution sites to minimize travel and security risks. WFP's site selection for food distribution prioritised accessibility and safety to reduce travel distances and exposure to active hostilities. PDM reports in 2022 and 2023 indicated that 97 percent to 98 percent of respondents did not experience security challenges related to WFP assistance.
96. Other agencies, such as UNICEF and UNHCR, also implemented context-sensitive safety protocols, particularly for frontline mobile service delivery and protection teams. As part of duty-of-care commitments, and to manage operational risks, agencies implemented staff well-being frameworks linked to safety and security. Operational reviews indicate that since 2022, agencies have taken steps to improve security communications, headcount procedures, and overall staff preparedness for potential evacuations.

#### 2.1.5. Civil Society Engagement

97. **Finding:** Despite the presence of a capable and experienced civil society, the international response—including IASC partners—did not sufficiently prioritise strategic engagement with local actors. Local organisations were often confined to operational roles, with limited influence over key decisions related to response design, coordination, or transition planning. While some capacity-strengthening initiatives were undertaken, these efforts were fragmented and not systematically embedded within broader localisation strategies. Systemic factors—such as funding modalities and coordination structures—continued to favour international actors, constraining locally led approaches and underutilising existing national capacities and coordination mechanisms..
98. Despite Ukraine's long-standing and capable civil society, national NGOs were insufficiently engaged in strategic and leadership roles within the international response. While operational partnerships existed, there was limited influence of local actors over decision-making processes, response design, and transition planning.
99. Humanitarian actors established generally functional operational partnerships with national and local civil society organisations (CSOs), though these relationships were often limited in influence and strategic engagement. Local actors were not always familiar with humanitarian standards or principles—such as neutrality—and frequently lacked prior experience or capacity

in emergency response. To address this, several agencies invested in training and capacity support, covering areas such as protection, gender equality, humanitarian principles, community feedback mechanisms, and logistics.

100. Dialogues between international agencies and national partners were often viewed as positive and constructive at the operational level, with cooperating partners consulted on programme delivery. However, CSOs were not consistently engaged in higher-level planning processes, including around transition or exit strategies. Strategic documents on localisation and sustainability generally reflected limited inclusion of national actors' perspectives.
101. Some agencies, while maintaining strong ties with government institutions and international actors, had more limited engagement with civil society and rights-holder groups. While efforts were made to include CSOs in consultations and reporting processes, the contribution of these engagements to longer-term advocacy, accountability, or institutional strengthening of local actors remained modest.
102. Many Ukrainian organizations, at least in Kyiv and other major cities, already had well-developed capacities to implement their human rights-related mandates and activities. Initiatives to monitor human rights in court proceedings were implemented by CSO representatives with financial support from international organizations and donors. While Ukrainian CSOs were implementing a broad range of actions in support of accountability, HRMMU's contribution to their accountability-related results was limited during the period under review by the evaluation.
103. Additional interviews, carried out by the synthesis team with national NGOs, underscored that while they had strong pre-existing coordination mechanisms and response capacity, these were largely overlooked in the early international scale-up. Many donors – particularly European – lacked funding modalities to directly support national NGOs, favouring newly arrived INGOs or United Nations agencies. This limited the potential for locally led solutions and exacerbated perceptions of exclusion.

## 2.2 IASC Collective Response in Ukraine: Results Achieved for Vulnerable Groups

**SQ 2:** To what extent does the evidence find that IASC members' collective efforts were able to effectively respond to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, especially in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable?

### 2.2.1. Effectiveness of Interventions

104. **Finding:** Agency evaluations show that the combined efforts of IASC members in Ukraine were largely effective in delivering a substantial humanitarian response, particularly in the early stages of the war, responding to a humanitarian crisis triggered by the full-scale invasion. Supported by strong cluster-level leadership and substantial donor funding, humanitarian actors successfully delivered essential assistance to millions of people across multiple sectors. Food assistance and MPCA were scaled up quickly and reached substantial coverage. Protection services – particularly legal aid and civil documentation – achieved notable reach and impact. Emergency shelter, winterisation support and site management services stabilised displacement conditions in collective centres, while WASH and child-focused interventions ensured continuity of critical services in affected areas.
105. Across all agencies there was limited emphasis on livelihoods and the development of integrated recovery pathways. The effectiveness of longer-term support was constrained by rigid modality choices and fragmented programming.
106. Targeting was an area of concern. While IASC members' collective efforts were effective overall, the response was stronger in scale and speed than in precision or sustainability. There remains scope to improve vulnerability targeting, shift modalities toward cash assistance and strengthen transition planning for government-led solutions.
107. **Food Security and Livelihoods:** The sector delivered large-scale food support and MPCA, however the humanitarian response in Ukraine to food insecurity and disrupted livelihoods varied significantly across agencies. While all three engaged agencies, WFP, UNICEF and IOM, delivered some degree of success in meeting immediate needs, evaluations showed that the transition toward sustainable livelihoods and the broader operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus remained a common weakness. Each agency adopted a distinct approach shaped by their mandates, capacities and operational contexts.
108. WFP led the food security response and co-led the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster with FAO, playing a central role in delivering both in-kind food and cash assistance to over 17 million people. It exceeded output targets and contributed to improved food consumption outcomes among beneficiaries. Early preparedness measures, including pre-positioned stocks and advance financing, supported a timely scale-up of operations. While WFP expanded its use of cash-based transfers over time, the pace of transition was shaped by a range of factors, including procurement pipelines, internal systems, and differing stakeholder preferences. These dynamics influenced the balance between modalities and the speed at which

adjustments could be made. Disagreements within the Cash Working Group over revised MPCA transfer values in 2023 contributed to WFP expanding its sectoral cash assistance in place of some MPCA, with implications for coordination, deduplication, and future transition to national social protection systems.

109. Livelihoods and early recovery were not prominent components of the food security response during the initial phases. WFP's programming focused primarily on meeting immediate food needs, with limited investment in resilience or food systems support, and minimal progress in advancing the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus. UNICEF contributed to food security indirectly through multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) aimed at covering basic needs. Similarly, IOM's MPCA supported immediate consumption needs but was not explicitly designed or monitored for longer-term food security outcomes. Some NGOs, including the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Depaul Ukraine, implemented more integrated approaches. DRC piloted local partner grants and targeted underserved rural areas, while Depaul complemented assistance with legal aid, housing repairs, psychosocial support, and a responsive feedback mechanism that helped align services with beneficiary needs.
110. Overall, while the sector performed well in delivering large-scale humanitarian food assistance, it was significantly less effective in enabling livelihoods, reducing dependency or supporting early recovery. Several factors contributed to this gap. While the evaluation sources reviewed do not offer a detailed analysis on *why* livelihoods programming was inconsistently delivered, triangulation and contextual reading point to a number of plausible contributing factors. Livelihoods were not prioritised partly due to the urgency of meeting immediate needs and the assumption that development actors or government-led mechanisms would take the lead on recovery and economic resilience. The persistent siloing of emergency assistance, coupled with modality misalignments – such as a continued reliance on short-term, in-kind support – further limited opportunities to support self-reliance or restore productive capacities. In addition, traditional livelihoods programming approaches were not always adapted to Ukraine's urbanised, formal economy, making it more difficult to design appropriate interventions. The lack of investment in integrated, resilience-building programmes constrained the longer-term effectiveness of the food security and livelihoods response, and limited progress in operationalising the HDP nexus.
111. **Cash Assistance:** Cash assistance was a cornerstone of the humanitarian response in Ukraine, with agencies such as UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and IOM contributing to one of the largest cash responses globally. UNHCR played a technically respected role in the Cash Working Group (CWG), helping to shape targeting standards and deduplication mechanisms, while also co-leading task teams. In support of these efforts, WFP introduced the Building Blocks deduplication system in May 2022. By 2025, over 60 organisations had used the system. Over US\$ 173 million in MPCA was distributed during 2022–2023, providing flexible support that beneficiaries overwhelmingly preferred. UNICEF's humanitarian cash transfer programme, implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Social Policy, enabled a rapid scale-up of cash aid and helped seed Ukraine's transition toward a more shock-responsive social protection system. IOM's MPCA was also widely appreciated, with 75 percent of recipients reporting that

their basic needs were fully met. (See Annex F for additional information on cash-based assistance under the response)

112. The Ukraine response featured one of the largest and most rapidly scaled humanitarian cash assistance programmes globally. Both UNHCR and WFP moved swiftly to deliver multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA), leveraging existing systems and partnerships. In 2022 alone, WFP reached over 700,000 people with MPCA while maintaining a substantial in-kind footprint throughout the response. By 2024, UNHCR had reached more than 600,000 people annually with MPCA, with cash assistance increasing from 36% of its in-kind/NFI portfolio in 2022 to 76% in 2024, indicating a significant shift toward cash-based support. UNICEF's humanitarian cash transfer programme, implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Social Policy, also had considerable reach and impact, particularly in terms of inclusion and alignment with national systems. However, the programme faced early operational challenges, including staffing limitations and technical delays linked to payment platforms outside UNICEF's direct control. These issues affected timeliness and reliability but were addressed over time. Despite the scale and speed of the cash response, effectiveness was still constrained in some areas. In particular, cash assistance remained insufficiently linked to complementary services such as livelihoods, protection, or behavioural change, limiting its contribution to more sustainable, recovery-oriented outcomes. Some sectors—such as shelter and winterisation—continued to rely heavily on in-kind modalities, even where market conditions allowed for greater use of cash. Certain vulnerable groups, including Roma communities, older persons, and the digitally excluded, faced barriers to accessing cash assistance due to programme design limitations and uneven inclusion strategies. While the cash response succeeded in delivering timely short-term support at scale, its integration into broader recovery planning and equitable access frameworks remained a work in progress.
113. **Protection:** The Protection Cluster<sup>10</sup>, under UNHCR's leadership, delivered significant positive and intended effects, particularly through legal aid, community-based protection, and co-leadership models with national actors. However, gaps in intersectional analysis and feedback systems limited the ability to fully understand or address unintended consequences or to optimise the targeting of vulnerable groups. The cluster had a strong influence on transitioning to durable solutions but scaling and coherence across the broader inter-agency system remain areas for improvement.
114. Protection services achieved high reach and tangible legal and social outcomes, and the co-leadership model with national NGOs set a precedent for inclusive coordination. However, the absence of systematic vulnerability analysis and cohesive inter-agency planning limited broader protection effectiveness.

---

<sup>10</sup> The synthesis team did not have access to specific evaluation findings or documentation related to the Child Protection, GBV, and Mine Action Areas of Responsibility (AORs). As such, these areas are not explicitly covered in the analysis.

115. UNHCR in collaboration with the national NGO Right to Protection, was largely effective in reaching war-affected populations with essential legal, documentation, and community-based protection services. In 2023, approximately 1.48 million people received protection support, marking it as UNHCR's largest assistance category. The Protection Cluster's inclusive leadership and strong use of national coordination structures enabled timely and relevant service delivery and served as a model of localisation and partnership. Protection programming also played a bridging role between humanitarian aid and early recovery, particularly through area-based approaches and community-level engagement.

116. **Positive, Intended Effects:**

- **Strong protection reach:** In 2023, UNHCR and its partners reached approximately 1.48 million people with protection information, counselling and support. This was the largest single assistance category delivered by UNHCR that year.
- **Effective cluster leadership:** UNHCR's leadership of the Protection Cluster is described as strong and strategic, particularly in leveraging pre-existing national partnerships and coordination platforms. The co-leadership with the national NGO Right to Protection is highlighted as an example of effective localisation and inclusive coordination.
- **Contribution to legal aid and civil documentation:** Protection activities, particularly around legal assistance and documentation (including Housing, Land and Property rights), had tangible effects on people's access to services, restitution and claims – especially for IDPs and returnees.
- **Support for durable solutions:** UNHCR used its protection programming as a bridge to early recovery, contributing to area-based approaches and community-based protection strategies that supported transitions from relief to longer-term solutions.

117. **Negative or Unintended Effects / Limitations:**

- **Limited intersectional analysis:** Despite positive reach, the evaluation reports reviewed found gaps in intersectional vulnerability analysis which reduced the effectiveness of targeting the most at-risk populations (e.g. persons with disabilities, older people, Roma and LGBTQ+ individuals). Targeting is identified as a factor limiting effectiveness.
- **Inconsistencies in feedback loops:** The protection response lacked coherent and systematic mechanisms to gather and respond to community feedback, limiting its ability to adapt or identify unintended harms promptly.
- **Challenges in scale and coherence:** While impactful, protection interventions were not always aligned across humanitarian actors, and the Area-Based Approach lacked coherence at the inter-agency level. This undermined the potential for scale and consistency in protection outcomes.

118. **Shelter/NFI and CCCM:** UNHCR's leadership of the Shelter/NFI and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) clusters resulted in a substantial response that provided immediate support to hundreds of thousands of people. In 2023 alone, 575,273 individuals received essential household items, while 246,160 benefited from emergency shelter or housing repair



support. In 2022, winterisation targets were exceeded, particularly in frontline and high-damage areas, and the CCCM response reached over 300 percent of its initial site coverage targets. The early scale-up of CCCM activities helped stabilise collective sites, facilitated access to protection and shelter services, and promoted participatory governance through IDP councils and site-level feedback systems.

119. However, the response faced important limitations as the crisis evolved. Both clusters remained overly reliant on in-kind assistance, particularly in shelter and winterisation support, despite operating in contexts where cash-based modalities would have improved efficiency and dignity of choice. This resistance to cash-first approaches reflected broader institutional inertia and a lack of coherent adaptation to beneficiary preferences and market conditions. The quality of services in collective sites varied significantly and, by 2023, coverage was reduced in favour of improving service standards. Still, sustainability planning remained weak. The CCCM Cluster lacked a clear exit strategy or benchmarks for transition to national authorities, and there were few efforts to prepare government partners for taking over site management functions. As in other sectors, vulnerabilities within collective sites were not adequately assessed or addressed, particularly for persons with disabilities and older persons.
120. In summary, while the Shelter/NFI and CCCM clusters delivered vital emergency support, the overall effectiveness of these sectors declined over time due to delayed modality shifts, inconsistent vulnerability targeting, and weak transition planning. These sectors succeeded in providing scale and stability but fell short in sustainability and systemic integration.

### 2.2.2. Equity, Inclusion, Human Rights

121. **Finding:** The evaluation evidence indicates that the humanitarian response in Ukraine showed inconsistent progress in promoting equity, inclusion and human rights. Although substantial efforts were made to document and advocate for accountability on serious human rights violations, operational initiatives aimed at reaching and supporting marginalised populations varied considerably. Monitoring mechanisms led to increased awareness and action surrounding human rights issues, strengthening state efforts and accountability. This work ensured that violations against vulnerable populations – including women, children, and persons with disabilities – were visible and informed national reforms and post-war recovery planning.
122. Despite these contributions, the integration of gender equality, disability inclusion and intersectional vulnerabilities in humanitarian programming remained generally weak. Gender mainstreaming was applied inconsistently, and emergency responses often lacked disaggregated data or context-specific gender analyses. Gender equality was frequently sidelined in favour of compliance-related issues, such as PSEA, which limited a more transformative approach. Similarly, disability inclusion varied across sectors and locations, with some localised successes in inclusive education and deinstitutionalisation, yet there were no strategic indicators or sustained targeting throughout the programmes.

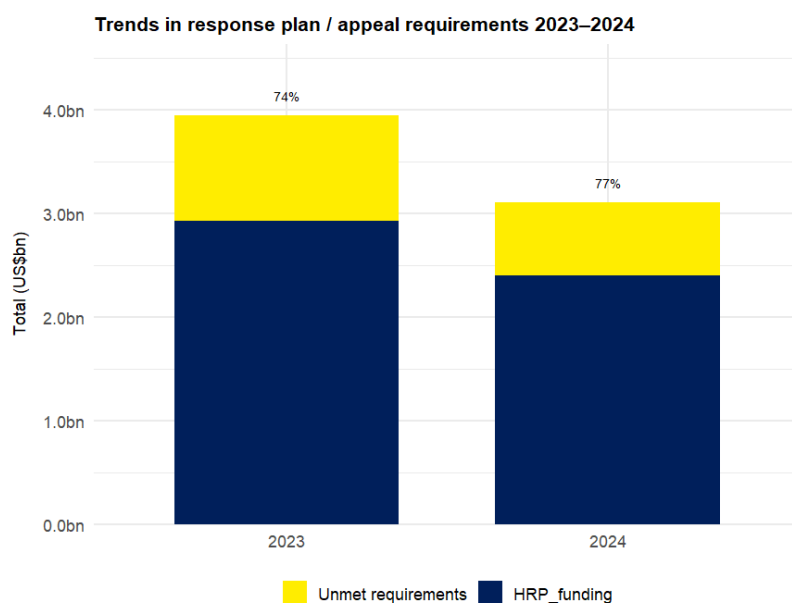


123. The response did make some progress in addressing the needs of marginalized groups, such as the Roma community, the elderly, and children with disabilities. However, these efforts were typically reactive rather than strategic, shaped by partner capacity or geographic accessibility rather than systemic planning. Inclusion initiatives often emerged later in the response, as operational strategies adapted and partnerships deepened. Nonetheless, challenges in aligning tools and approaches to Ukraine's specific socio-political context, particularly in relation to gender norms and service accessibility, limited the depth and consistency of these efforts.
124. Systemic enablers such as partnerships, protection mainstreaming and rights-based monitoring were important but insufficient to ensure coherent and inclusive service delivery. Weak leadership structures, coordination constraints, and reliance on under-resourced national systems further constrained equitable targeting. The humanitarian response missed critical opportunities to embed equity and inclusion at the core of its HNRP strategies. Addressing these gaps will require a stronger organizational commitment, investment in staff capacity, and improved tools to identify and respond to intersecting vulnerabilities in a context-sensitive and accountable manner.

### 2.2.3. Enabling/Inhibiting Factors

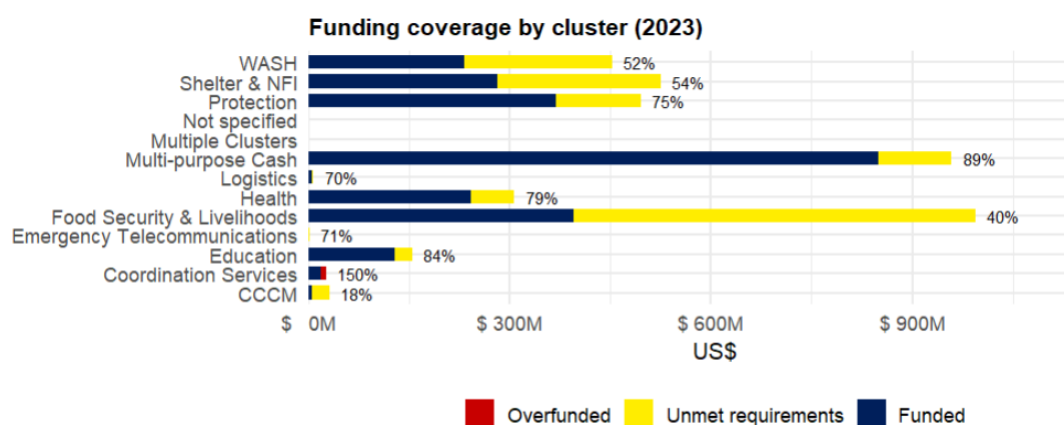
125. **Finding:** The effectiveness of the humanitarian response in Ukraine was influenced by a combination of enabling and inhibiting factors. The rapid mobilisation of flexible funding facilitated a swift scale-up and coverage of underfunded sectors. However, overall funding remained inadequate relative to needs, and some critical areas, such as food security and livelihoods and WASH and shelter/NFI, were under-resourced. The urgency to expend funds quickly also contributed to shortfalls in planning, risk management and due diligence.
126. Funding within the HRPs for 2023 and 2024 did not fully meet the stated requirements. In 2023, funding covered 74 percent of the requested annual amount, a percentage that increased slightly to 77 percent in 2024. (Figure 1)

**Figure 1 – Trends in response plans / appeal requirements 2023-2024**



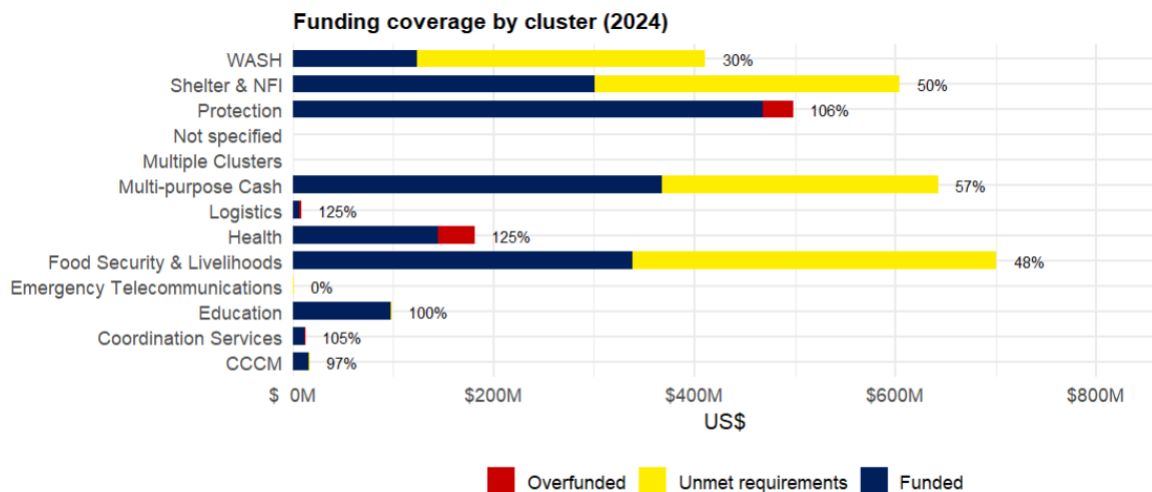
Source: FTS extracted in May 2025 from Ukraine HRP page - The percentage is showing the funded %.

**Figure 2 – Funding coverage against cluster requirements in 2023**



Source: FTS extracted in May 2025 from HRP yearly page. The percentage is showing the funded %.

**Figure 3 – Funding coverage against requirements in 2024**



Source: FTS extracted in May 2025 from HRP yearly page. The percentage is showing the funded %.

127. An analysis of cluster funding between 2023 and 2024 shows a slight overall improvement in 2024, with funding meeting a marginally higher share of requirements. However, this masks significant variations across clusters. In absolute terms, the Food Security and Livelihoods, MPCA and Protection clusters received the highest funding in both years. Relative to requirements, Coordination Services, Logistics, Health and Protection were among the best funded, in some cases exceeding their targets. The steepest declines in coverage occurred in Emergency Telecommunications (–70 percent) and MPCA (–31 percent), while improvements were noted in CCCM, Logistics and Protection. (Figures 2 and 3)
128. Human resources were another key factor. Surge deployments facilitated immediate action, but recruitment delays, high turnover and limited contextual knowledge among newly deployed staff impeded continuity and effectiveness. Misinterpretation of emergency policies occasionally resulted in weakened controls and oversight.
129. Coordination and management arrangements, particularly in the early phases, were often unclear or too centralised, hindering decision-making and field-level implementation. Rigid United Nations administrative systems further diminished responsiveness. Efforts to localise the response progressed but were limited by insufficient preparedness and capacity support, especially in the initial months.
130. Monitoring systems improved over time; however, their integration into programme adaptation remained inadequate. Decision-making often relied on internal or government inputs rather than community engagement, which limited the accountability and responsiveness of the response. Collectively, these factors underscore the need for enhanced preparedness, more flexible systems and stronger local engagement in future large-scale emergencies.

## 2.2.4. Humanitarian Access in Ukraine: Challenges and Efforts

131. **Finding:** Access to populations in need has been a defining challenge for the humanitarian response in Ukraine. The full-scale invasion in 2022 led to a sharp increase in both the scale of needs and the complexities involved in reaching those affected, particularly in areas not under

the control of the Government of Ukraine (i.e. non-government-controlled areas – NGCAs). Despite ongoing efforts at multiple levels – operational, inter-agency, and diplomatic – progress in securing access to the hardest-hit areas has remained limited, with various evaluation reports highlighting there has not been a sufficient breakthrough in addressing the lack of access, revealing systemic constraints and highlighting critical lessons for future responses in contested settings.

132. **Efforts to identify and address access constraints.** Evaluation reports identified access constraints, especially in Russian-occupied territories and areas experiencing ongoing hostilities. These regions were repeatedly assessed by the HCT as having the highest severity of unmet needs, yet they remained largely out of reach due to political, military, and security barriers. Needs assessment reports, monitoring exercises, and mapping tools effectively highlighted these gaps; however, translating these findings into negotiated access proved extremely difficult.
133. The UNICEF evaluation report highlighted that humanitarian organizations made efforts to escalate the access issue to the Emergency Director’s group and the IASC Principals to gain access to areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine. But while efforts took place to address this, evaluation reports cast doubt on the adequacy of attention paid to the issue. The UNICEF report highlights that “while the crisis was deeply political, and complex, there was a strong sense from among internal (CO and HQ) and external interviewees that the failure to access those in greatest need in these areas represented a collective failure of the humanitarian community”.
134. **Negotiation and collective advocacy.** At the collective level, multiple agencies actively engaged in advocacy for access through the HCT, the Emergency Directors Group, and the IASC Principals. Despite these efforts, humanitarian access negotiations did not result in significant breakthroughs. This experience highlighted the limits of the international system’s leverage, even at the highest levels of coordination. Despite a broad recognition of the urgent needs in inaccessible areas, the lack of progress was widely perceived by national and international stakeholders as a collective failure.
135. The UNHCR evaluation highlighted that the agency played an important role in supporting the collective advocacy efforts to negotiate access while maintaining a principled position, including by contributing to inter-agency convoys to frontline areas where access was possible. Similarly, UNICEF actively contributed to the inter-agency Humanitarian Operations Planning Cell, leveraging its last-mile delivery partners to reach high-risk and newly accessible areas, such as those in the east and south.
136. **Adaptive approaches and remote modalities.** Where direct access was not feasible, agencies employed alternative approaches. WFP conducted remote multisectoral needs assessments in areas under the control of the Russian Federation that were inaccessible from 2022 to 2024. These assessments informed contingency planning and demonstrated a commitment to being prepared should the political impasse be resolved. OHCHR developed innovative remote

monitoring methodologies, including forensic analysis and the involvement of military analysts, to track protection violations and human rights conditions in occupied territories without a physical presence. UNICEF and IOM also adapted operationally by shifting resources to newly accessible areas and increasing support to implementing partners. While these strategies enabled some outreach to affected populations, access remained patchy and inconsistent due to fluctuating security conditions, staffing constraints, and logistical challenges.

137. **Constraints and tensions with operational independence.** Maintaining access sometimes necessitated close coordination with government actors, which created tensions concerning the principle of independence. Some of the evaluation evidence noted that compromises needed to be made to sustain operational access, particularly in sensitive areas. While such engagements were often necessary to reach affected populations, they occasionally raised concerns about the perceived neutrality and independence of the response. Some organizations found it challenging to sustain a balanced relationship that enabled both access facilitation and principled programming. Moreover, in areas where agencies lacked presence, the utilisation of local partners for last-mile delivery raised concerns about the capacity to monitor and ensure adherence to humanitarian principles (especially impartiality and independence), particularly in highly sensitive zones. The WFP evaluation report highlighted the efforts to promote an impartial response, but a lack of humanitarian access in areas under the military control of the Russian Federation undercut these. This inability to access significant areas of the country impacted the ability to reach some of the most urgent cases, particularly in the front-line oblasts. It affected the humanitarian community as a whole, as stated in the WFP Corporate Emergency Evaluation report: *“The inability of the UN and other major humanitarian actors to negotiate access into the areas under the military control of the Russian Federation after the February 2022 escalation of the war has affected the entire humanitarian intervention.”*
138. **No sustainable humanitarian corridors.** Despite numerous efforts, there was limited evaluation evidence of durable or formally negotiated humanitarian corridors to NGCAs. Agencies reported deep frustration with the lack of mechanisms to ensure safe passage for aid or protection actors, despite United Nations leadership and donors' recognition of the urgency. The inability to secure humanitarian corridors points to the political and military complexities of the Ukrainian context and the limited influence humanitarian actors had on negotiating the terms of access with all parties to the war.

#### 2.2.5. Humanitarian Principles

139. **Finding:** The humanitarian response in Ukraine unfolded within a highly politicised and operationally complex environment. Across the collective response, humanitarian actors showed a strong normative commitment to upholding core humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – while also contending with a range of unavoidable trade-offs and operational tensions. However, applying these principles was uneven and frequently constrained by the political context, access restrictions, scale and speed of operations, and relationships with state and non-state actors. Evaluative evidence points to notable efforts and critical gaps in applying these principles in practice.

140. **Promoting humanity and impartiality in a politicised landscape.** Humanitarian actors broadly prioritised the principle of humanity in their responses, aiming to alleviate suffering and deliver assistance at scale, especially in the early phases of the crisis. This was often achieved through rapid mobilization and a 'no-regrets' approach, prioritising broad coverage over refined targeting. However, this early emphasis on scale occasionally came at the expense of impartiality and the ability to tailor responses to those in greatest need.
141. As the response evolved, many humanitarian actors recalibrated their operations toward more needs-based and geographically targeted assistance, particularly in the eastern and southern regions. This shift reflected a growing adherence to the principle of impartiality, following an initial emphasis on speed and coverage. The principle of humanity was consistently evident, especially in the early phase of the response, where wide-reaching, "no-regrets" approaches were employed to ensure rapid delivery of supplies and cash transfers. While effective in reaching large caseloads during a time of uncertainty, such approaches initially limited the ability to target the most vulnerable and posed challenges for impartiality.
142. Over time, actors transitioned from largely supply-driven modalities to more targeted, partner-led interventions that improved the relevance and equity of assistance in underserved areas. Efforts to understand community needs, conduct assessments, and adapt delivery mechanisms increased as operational presence expanded. Nonetheless, balancing the urgency of large-scale delivery with meaningful engagement and contextual sensitivity remained a challenge across the response.
143. **Navigating the principle of neutrality.** Maintaining neutrality proved particularly challenging, given the widespread donor alignment with the Ukrainian government, the inclusion of military considerations within national legislation on humanitarian aid, and the active involvement of Western donors in the war. This blurred the lines between humanitarian and political or military action, affecting perceptions of neutrality and independence. National civil society actors and volunteer groups – essential for last-mile delivery – often rejected the concept of neutrality outright, further complicating efforts by international agencies to uphold this principle throughout their operational chains.
144. Neutrality was one of the most difficult principles to maintain. The direct military and political involvement of donor governments, combined with a strong alignment with the Ukrainian state, created a highly politicised environment. WFP, for example, was acutely aware of the risks of perceived politicisation and made efforts to safeguard neutrality through the careful selection and training of cooperating partners. Yet, these efforts were challenged by the limited experience of many local actors with humanitarian norms and by the explicit rejection of neutrality by some national civil society groups and frontline responders.
145. In Ukraine, the activities undertaken as part of the humanitarian response presented ethical and operational challenges. Agencies like UNHCR responded by adopting and promoting Joint Operating Principles to uphold a principled approach among staff, contractors and partners.

However, maintaining neutrality and impartiality in this context required continuous negotiation, internal reflection and operational compromise.

146. **Challenges to independence in a strong state context.** The functioning of Ukraine's government and the solidarity it received from donors offered both advantages and complications. On one hand, collaboration with state institutions enabled swift scale-up and integration with national systems. On the other hand, several agencies struggled to maintain operational independence and space for critical engagement, particularly where programming was shaped by government requests or embedded in state-led distribution mechanisms. Striking the balance between leveraging government capacity which, although strong, was having to focus resources on the war effort, and safeguarding humanitarian independent decision-making emerged as a persistent challenge.
147. Operational independence was another area where agencies encountered challenges, particularly in coordinating closely with a capable and sovereign national government. UNICEF's strong relationship with government counterparts facilitated integration with national systems and supported the transition from humanitarian to recovery-focused programming. At the same time, this close engagement sometimes blurred operational boundaries and constrained UNICEF's ability to challenge government directions when necessary – an issue also noted in the context of upholding the principle of independence.
148. UNHCR, by contrast, was generally able to maintain a principled and needs-based approach while fostering a respectful relationship with national and local authorities. Evaluative evidence suggests that it preserved independent needs analysis and decision-making despite pressures linked to donor expectations and state priorities.
149. **Contextual trade-offs and the lack of deliberation.** Despite widespread awareness of principle-related dilemmas, agencies generally fell short in systematically identifying, contextualising, or communicating the trade-offs required in Ukraine's operational environment. While individual actors acknowledged the difficulties, especially in access-limited areas, there was limited evidence of principled red lines or structured guidance to staff on how to navigate tensions between principles such as impartiality and access. In some cases, decisions prioritised reaching the largest number of people (humanity) even if this reduced the ability to target the most vulnerable (impartiality).
150. Despite widespread awareness of principle-related dilemmas, few agencies explicitly documented or guided staff on the necessary trade-offs. WFP, for instance, showed strong concern for impartiality and neutrality in its operations but lacked Ukraine-specific guidance on how to navigate tensions between principles. Evaluators found limited evidence of systematic recognition, deliberation, or documentation of these trade-offs – for example, the tension between prioritizing humanity (delivering aid at scale) and impartiality (targeting the most vulnerable), which emerged early in the response.

151. The absence of explicit red lines and structured decision-making frameworks hampered collective capacity to navigate the ethical complexities of principled action in this highly politicized emergency.
152. **Access constraints and the challenge of impartiality.** Restricted humanitarian access to NGCAs significantly compromised the ability of agencies to realise impartiality. Needs assessments consistently identified urgent needs in these inaccessible regions. While humanitarian actors made efforts to engage remotely and plan contingencies, the political impasse over access – largely beyond the control of operational agencies – remained unresolved. Opportunities for more coordinated or strategic engagement may have existed, but it is also clear that the access constraints were shaped by dynamics outside the humanitarian system’s influence. The persistence of access barriers – whose resolution falls primarily within the responsibility of duty bearers – ultimately left critical gaps in coverage and raised concerns about the equity and reach of the response.
153. WFP and UNICEF both acknowledged that the greatest unmet needs often lay in the NGCAs, but access restrictions stemming from military control, government policies, and security dynamics made it impossible to operate there. WFP mitigated this by conducting remote multisectoral assessments in inaccessible areas over three consecutive years to inform contingency planning – demonstrating a commitment to impartiality, even in the absence of operational access.
154. **Conflict sensitivity and community engagement.** Evaluations show that the application of conflict sensitivity and AAP principles varied across agencies. These approaches are integral to upholding humanitarian principles, especially humanity, impartiality and neutrality, by ensuring assistance does not exacerbate tensions and is delivered fairly. While efforts to integrate these considerations became more visible as programmes matured, early responses often applied a narrow Do No Harm lens to conflict sensitivity, without systematically addressing underlying social tensions – such as those between IDPs and host communities, or language-based divisions. UNHCR’s evaluation report noted the proactive engagement with affected populations and for adapting programming to help prevent the exacerbation of social tensions. UNICEF’s L3 evaluation indicated that some social tensions—particularly between IDPs and host communities, as well as between Russian and Ukrainian language speakers—persisted in certain regions but were not a focus within its programming. More consistent and deeper engagement with affected populations, as demonstrated in some parts of the response, contributed to contextually responsive programming and enhanced credibility. However, such practices were not uniformly adopted across the collective response.
155. **Institutional credibility and impartial presence.** OHCHR’s emphasis on maintaining an appropriate balance of international and national staff was cited by donors as essential to safeguarding the impartiality and credibility of its operations. This example underscores the value of perceived independence and neutrality in protecting the credibility of the humanitarian response, particularly in contexts where political sensitivities are acute.

## 2.2.6. Cross-cutting Issues



156. **Finding:** The evidence shows that while gender, disability inclusion, PSEA, and AAP were addressed across the Ukrainian humanitarian response, their systematic mainstreaming was inconsistent across agencies, sectors, and phases of the response. The IASC PSEA system was well established in Ukraine, however evaluations indicated uncertainty around the robustness of referral pathways and the availability of survivor support mechanisms.
157. **Gender equality:** Mainstreaming gender equality across the Ukraine humanitarian response was limited and inconsistent. While gender was broadly acknowledged as a priority, in practice it was often sidelined or overshadowed by other protection concerns such as GBV and PSEA with fewer efforts directed toward women's empowerment or addressing structural inequalities. Operational gaps were evident across agencies with operational integration of gender considerations hampered by limited staff awareness, lack of sex-disaggregated data, and weak gender analysis. Where gender-sensitive programming existed, it often lacked depth and failed to address intersecting vulnerabilities – for example, those faced by women with disabilities, older women or Roma women.
158. Tools and methodologies were not always adapted to the Ukrainian context, and gender-specific outcomes were rarely tracked or reported in a systematic way. Despite these operational limitations, there is evidence that some strategic-level efforts have contributed to enhancing gender equality within the broader response and recovery context. A notable step was the adoption of the Framework of Cooperation on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Spring 2022. This United Nations–Government of Ukraine initiative united the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (service provision to survivors), UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (institutional capacity building), along with other entities (e.g. OHCHR, UNICEF) to collaboratively implement an action plan centred on survivor assistance, access to justice and legislative reform.
159. **Disability inclusion:** Disability inclusion received more structured attention in the Ukrainian humanitarian response compared to some other cross-cutting issues, yet implementation remained inconsistent. Efforts were made to support persons with disabilities, particularly children, through inclusive education and deinstitutionalisation initiatives, and participatory assessments were employed to inform programming. However, disability considerations were not systematically integrated across all sectors, and there was a lack of dedicated targets, indicators and strategic focus. Progress in reaching persons with disabilities and the elderly was noted, but delivery mechanisms were often constrained by inflexible tools and reliance on national targeting systems that were not fully aligned with humanitarian inclusion standards. Broader systemic limitations and gaps in social services further hindered the consistent application of intersectional approaches to disability inclusion.
160. **PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse):** PSEA was generally prioritised in the Ukraine humanitarian response, but its implementation was uneven and not without limitations. While commitments were largely met over the course of the response, early efforts were hampered by limited internal capacity, and awareness of PSEA mechanisms among affected populations remained low. In some cases, the strong emphasis placed on PSEA

compliance came at the expense of broader gender equality objectives, diverting attention and resources. Although specific reporting on PSEA was limited in the available documentation, it is likely that PSEA measures were incorporated within wider protection strategies. The lack of visibility may reflect reporting gaps rather than an absence of action.

161. There was visible commitment to PSEA across the response and for agencies PSEA was a priority. Agencies implemented training and policy frameworks, although challenges remained in ensuring robust referral pathways and survivor support mechanisms. Agencies, including WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, contributed to PSEA coordination and training at the oblast level. Evidence of uptake and impact at the partner and community level, however, remained uneven.
162. According to the IASC PSEA country dashboard for Ukraine (2023), the inter-agency PSEA architecture was well established and operational. A dedicated PSEA Coordinator was in place, reporting directly to the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, and a fully functioning Inter-Agency PSEA Network was established, bringing together United Nations agencies, INGOs and NGOs, which WFP also co-chaired.
163. Stakeholders interviewed highlighted WFP's leading role and technical contribution to this network. While WFP is listed as a co-chair, meeting records from the second half of 2023 indicate that IOM and World Vision played key co-leadership roles. The network operated under clear TORs endorsed by the UNCT and HCT, and inter-agency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), initially drafted in 2022, were rolled out in 2023. PSEA was embedded as a cross-cutting commitment in the HRPs, though coverage of related needs remained uneven – only 38 percent of the population had access to safe and accessible SEA reporting channels, and only 52 percent of GBV sector needs were covered under the HRP and appeal.
164. **AAP (Accountability to Affected Populations):** Mechanisms were implemented as part of the humanitarian response in Ukraine, but their effectiveness and coherence varied. Complaints and feedback systems were established and utilised by affected populations – including women and older persons – indicating an adequate level of accessibility and relevance. However, the absence of a unified, cross-agency mechanism limited consistency across the response. The proliferation of separate hotlines reduced clarity and ease of access for beneficiaries. Early attempts to harmonise systems proved impractical due to coordination challenges and time constraints. Although steps were later taken to improve collaboration – such as participation in a dedicated AAP working group – it remains unclear whether these efforts influenced the integration of protection and accountability principles into national systems. Overall, AAP practices were fragmented and inconsistently applied, highlighting limitations in both coordination and long-term impact.

## 2.3 Transition Towards Recovery Oriented Response and a More Resilient Community

**SQ 3:** To what extent has the collective contributed to transitioning toward a recovery-oriented response and a more resilient country/community?

### 2.3.1. Nexus Approach – Linking Humanitarian Response to Resilience and Reconstruction

165. **Finding:** The collective response demonstrated a positive yet uneven progression towards integrating humanitarian action with resilience and reconstruction efforts. Most agencies adopted elements of recovery planning, with several establishing practical or normative connections to longer-term outcomes. However, the absence of a shared nexus strategy, inconsistent operationalization across sectors, and poor integration of peacebuilding efforts limited the coherence and sustainability of these initiatives. Divergence is apparent in the extent to which agencies developed structured transition plans and engaged with national recovery frameworks.
166. The evaluation findings indicate that while some agencies effectively integrated resilience components, coherence across the HDP nexus continued to pose challenges. Effective HDP requires strong recovery/development coordination which is still work in progress in Ukraine. UNHCR's leadership in the Durable Solutions Steering Committee and its early emphasis on solutions from the start were acknowledged as forward-looking. However, area-based approaches, which aimed to align humanitarian response with longer-term local recovery, faced difficulties in scaling up due to funding constraints, coordination inefficiencies, and varying levels of political commitment.
167. Agencies undertook a range of sustainability-focused actions across their collective response in Ukraine. These included explicit actions to strengthen the HDP nexus and the national systems through: 1) the digitalisation and modernisation of Ukraine's social protection systems; 2) support for legal and policy reforms; 3) integration of cash and service delivery models with state institutions; and 4) local governance and civil society engagement. While these actions varied in scope and scale, they reflect a shared recognition that humanitarian assistance should contribute to recovery and resilience pathways in the context of a protracted and politically sensitive crisis.
168. WFP initiated projects on food systems and livelihoods pilots, including support for smallholder producers. Nevertheless, the agency lacked a clear triple nexus strategy. Evaluations cited minimal engagement with peacebuilding actors and the absence of a structured approach to promoting social cohesion or conflict sensitivity. Targeting and beneficiary selection processes, particularly as funding declined, risked exacerbating local tensions. This absence of a conflict-sensitive framework was seen as a missed opportunity for WFP and other United Nations actors to build sustainable peace dividends.
169. IOM's whole-of-organization commitment to integrating humanitarian and developmental responses was evaluated as conceptually promising. However, internal coherence and field-

level implementation remained inconsistent, and evaluations highlighted gaps in operationalising these ambitions, including the lack of robust transition or sustainability plans.

170. The extent to which the United Nations collective response in Ukraine operationalised the HDP nexus is mixed, with notable strengths and persistent gaps. The overall trajectory shows a positive shift towards recovery-oriented programming, but the integration of humanitarian aid with resilience and peacebuilding efforts remains inconsistent across agencies and sectors.
171. Education, WASH, and child protection provide some of the most positive examples of nexus integration. The collective response, particularly through UNICEF, supported both emergency service continuity and the rebuilding of systems, including school rehabilitation, teacher support, and community-based protection networks. These efforts were increasingly coordinated with local authorities and aligned with Ukraine's recovery plans.
172. UNHCR contributed through area-based recovery models and the Durable Solutions Steering Committee, aiming to link displacement response with community recovery. However, scale limitations and coordination gaps reduced the systemic impact of these initiatives.
173. In contrast, other agencies such as WFP and IOM made progress in sector-specific recovery interventions, such as food systems and livelihoods, but lacked comprehensive strategies to connect these with broader recovery and peacebuilding frameworks. Evaluations noted that without an articulated transition plan, these efforts risked being isolated.
174. OHCHR added normative depth to the nexus through its documentation and legal advocacy work, laying the foundation for future reconciliation and justice. While not operational in recovery programming, this contribution is essential to ensuring sustainability in governance and accountability.
175. WHO highlights in its report on the primary health care humanitarian response significant challenges to operationalising the nexus in Ukraine, including conceptual ambiguity, limited funding, and structural misalignments—particularly in frontline areas—despite early recovery efforts being underway in parts of the health response.
176. Locally grounded partnerships with civil society actors, as demonstrated by DPU and others, foster resilience at the community level. However, evaluation evidence shows that sustainability is enhanced when these efforts are linked to government systems and supported by coherent national engagement.
177. Overall, the collective response demonstrates a willingness to engage with nexus principles; however, the absence of a unified strategy, joint planning frameworks, and consistent donor alignment has limited the full realisation of nexus potential.

### 2.3.2. Engagement with Government and National Systems

178. **Finding:** The collective response demonstrated a shared commitment to working through and supporting Ukrainian national systems, particularly in social protection, legal accountability,

and governance. Stronger outcomes were observed where early alignment with institutional frameworks occurred. Contributions to gender governance and Women, Peace and Security coordination through embedded technical support added normative depth. However, challenges persisted due to fragmented implementation, fiscal limitations, and the continued existence of parallel systems. Divergence is notable in the extent to which agencies embedded their programmes within existing government structures or supported systemic integration. While government capacity was strong, it was also very overstretched following the full-scale invasion and after six years of war. Evaluations show that there were gaps that United Nations agencies and NGOs stepped in to fill, with varying degrees of engagement at central level and across oblasts.

179. The evaluation evidence highlights the benefits of working with national systems but also reveals persistent barriers. UNHCR's long-term partnerships with state institutions were foundational to its protection and legal work, including civil documentation and GBV programming. Its secondment of staff to government offices and facilitation of policy reforms exemplify deeper institutional engagement. Still, the lack of multi-annual funding and limited visibility for partners on future plans impaired localisation.
180. UNICEF and WFP both contributed significantly to the digitalisation and strengthening of Ukraine's social protection systems in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Policy. WFP's and UNICEF's role in the Ukraine Transitional Framework or the PeReHID<sup>11</sup> Initiative and in developing the Unified Information System for the Social Sphere (UISSS) was widely recognised. It is noteworthy that for social protection UNICEF has been tasked with leading the Perekhid initiative involving several other UN entities, including WFP, UNHCR and IOM, the objective of which is to guide the transition of humanitarian multipurpose cash assistance caseloads to an inclusive shock-responsive social protection system. This system improved the efficiency and transparency of benefits for IDPs and other vulnerable populations. However, delays in formal agreements with the government, and WFP's limited engagement of civil society in its transition strategy, raised concerns. WFP faced difficulties supporting local organizations to 'graduate' into sustainable national NGOs. Many community-based organizations lacked scale and resources, and few benchmarks existed to monitor their trajectory toward independence. UNHCR initially expanded its network of community-based organizations (CBOs) both geographically and thematically to ensure niche coverage. Interviews with stakeholders, indicated that following the L3 evaluation findings UNHCR adopted a more strategic approach to strengthen CBO capacities and introduced a graduation model based on assessed capacities, aligning with broader transition and localization objectives.

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/UNUkraine\\_2022\\_2024\\_TransitionalFramework\\_Updated\\_EN.pdf](https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/UNUkraine_2022_2024_TransitionalFramework_Updated_EN.pdf)

181. OHCHR's contributions to normative systems, such as legislative reform, transitional justice, and institutional capacity building, offer a model of sustainability grounded in law and policy. Its engagement with the Ukrainian government, Parliament, judiciary, and civil society led to concrete changes in human rights standards and improved accountability mechanisms. Evaluations credit the Mission with influencing judicial decisions and contributing to a national human rights record that is likely to persist beyond the Mission's presence.
182. Despite these achievements, the overall humanitarian response still relies on parallel coordination structures, and the transition to national leadership in cluster coordination remains incomplete. UNHCR's evaluations stressed the urgent need for a coherent transition plan that integrates humanitarian coordination into national systems.
183. Sustainability is most evident in the United Nations support to national systems, especially in social protection, health, education, gender and governance. A collective emphasis on state-led delivery, digital integration, and institutional partnerships characterised the response, though progress varied.
184. UNICEF's humanitarian cash transfers were among the first to align with national registries, while WFP co-led the PeReHID Initiative to transition humanitarian caseloads into Ukraine's shock-responsive social protection system. These efforts, although still incomplete, show how coordinated action can enhance sustainability.
185. UNHCR reinforced national capacity through memoranda of understanding with key ministries, support for legal aid, and the promotion of civil documentation systems. It also contributed to the professionalisation of community-based organizations, though sustainability risks remain due to limited scale and planning.
186. OHCHR's support to national legal and policy frameworks has been a key contribution. The agency helped shape Ukraine's National Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan, advocated for legislative reform, and supported judicial accountability mechanisms. These normative gains are a durable element of the collective response.
187. UN Women's efforts highlighted that sustainability can be enhanced when technical expertise is embedded within national systems. Their gender-focused system strengthening is consistent with the findings for normative reform actors (such as OHCHR) but also highlights the importance of clarity in institutional mandates and formalised partnerships.
188. Despite progress, parallel humanitarian systems persist in some areas, and coordination challenges have slowed the transfer of responsibilities to national actors. Financial constraints, limited decentralisation capacity, and short planning cycles continue to undermine full national ownership.

## 2.4 Utilisation of National Capacities to Deliver Assistance at Scale

**SQ 4:** To what extent does the evidence find that the collective response in Ukraine made use of available national capacities, including local actors and partnerships, to deliver assistance to affected people?

189. **Finding:** The collective humanitarian response in Ukraine demonstrated a strong rhetorical and operational commitment to localisation and the utilisation of national capacities. Key United Nations agencies, INGOs and the IFRC mobilized national NGOs, CSOs and local authorities at scale.
190. However, this engagement was uneven, constrained by funding modalities, coordination structures, and a systemic tendency to prioritise international systems over existing Ukrainian capacities.
191. The response was most effective where local coordination and area-based approaches were employed, yet persistent power asymmetries, donor inflexibility, and limited co-leadership opportunities impeded transformational localisation. Recent interviews confirm that the transition from operational inclusion to strategic power-sharing remains a critical gap, particularly in moving from cluster-based to government-integrated, issue-driven coordination.

### 2.4.1. Partnerships and Localisation

192. **Finding:** The response significantly expanded engagement with national and local partners, particularly since 2022. However, efforts were often ad hoc and reactive, with localisation pursued as a means of scaling operations rather than a long-term strategic commitment. Donor systems and the humanitarian architecture did not adequately recognise or build upon Ukraine's pre-existing civil society and government capacities. Many national NGOs had established coordination mechanisms and partnerships well before the escalation of the war, particularly since 2014. Yet, these existing systems were not sufficiently considered by international actors, leading to the establishment of parallel structures. National NGOs had long-standing coordination mechanisms pre-2022, which were ignored in the early international response. Donors were found to lack direct funding modalities for national actors.
193. Over time, humanitarian actors have increased their funding to national actors, with United Nations agencies' partner budgets shifting increasingly to local and national NGOs. For example, UNHCR allocated 90 percent of its partner budget to national actors, aiming to foster inclusive partnerships, particularly with organizations supporting persons with disabilities and women-led groups. These efforts were reinforced through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Ukrainian ministries and local authorities, helping to align humanitarian action with national systems and creating opportunities for joint advocacy and policy influence. A partner survey further confirmed that 78 percent of UNHCR's implementing partners felt heard and empowered to adjust programming.



194. However, while funding to local partners increased, it was not sufficiently complemented by deeper strategic involvement, remaining focused primarily on operational delivery. UNICEF scaled up its partnerships under significant internal strain and was rated positively by partners for its communication and flexibility. Nonetheless, localisation remained an operational function rather than a pathway toward power-sharing or systemic change. Similarly, WFP transitioned to working with national NGOs and provided compliance-oriented training, yet its short-term FLAs constrained institutional capacity development, limiting the sustainability of its localisation approach.
195. Across agencies, localisation tended to address immediate delivery needs rather than advance broader strategic objectives. Opportunities for inclusive planning, shared decision-making, and embedded leadership roles for national actors were often overlooked or under-prioritised. Systemic factors further compounded these limitations. Many donors lacked flexible mechanisms to directly fund national NGOs and instead channelled resources through international organizations, including newly established entities without prior experience in Ukraine. This layered response model increased transaction costs and diluted opportunities to leverage national capacities directly.
196. The IASC OPR underscored that Ukrainian national and local authorities were actively engaged in all aspects of the humanitarian response. The international response relied heavily on domestic governance and civil society capabilities – especially for last-mile delivery. In many cases, national institutions were more operationally present than international actors. However, engagement with authorities remained uneven. Agencies often engaged bilaterally with line ministries or oblast-level officials, bypassing national coordination mechanisms and reinforcing fragmentation. This created a risk of parallel structures and missed the opportunity for system-wide coherence. The OPR concluded that international actors must adapt their coordination practices to existing national frameworks rather than expecting local actors to conform to IASC systems. Notable efforts by UNHCR and UNICEF to align with state structures and support national co-leads – such as Right to Protection in the Protection Cluster – were cited as positive examples of progress.
197. Despite these efforts, the traditional coordination system continued to pose challenges. The cluster architecture, in particular, was frequently described as overly bureaucratic and difficult for smaller CSOs to navigate. Interviews and feedback from local actors highlighted that cluster meetings were often dominated by INGOs and UN agencies, limiting space for diverse or dissenting perspectives. While steps were taken to include local actors in coordination and funding structures, opportunities for meaningful and sustained participation by Ukrainian civil society in the governance of pooled funds remained limited. Although national NGOs had representation on the UHF Advisory Board, broader influence over strategic decision-making was constrained. As a result, some of the underlying power dynamics within the humanitarian response persisted and were not fully addressed.
198. To move from opportunistic partnerships to a more transformative localisation agenda, future efforts must centre national actors not only as implementers but as co-creators of response



strategy. Achieving this shift is likely to entail reforms in funding modalities, coordination practices, and leadership structures to ensure that localisation is both principled and systemic. Encouragingly, emerging models of shared leadership – such as co-leadership by national NGOs in clusters – offer pathways for more equitable and sustainable humanitarian engagement.

#### 2.4.2. Use and Integration of Local Response Capacities

199. **Finding:** Despite Ukraine's strong governance structures and the presence of capable local institutions and civil society, the integration of these capacities into the international humanitarian response was uneven and frequently fragmented. While operational delivery through local actors expanded significantly, particularly in frontline areas, system-wide coordination and institutional alignment with national systems remained limited. Opportunities to build on Ukraine's pre-existing tools, decentralised governance, and digital infrastructure were often missed, as humanitarian systems defaulted to externally driven and parallel modalities.
200. **Operational use and system integration of local capacities.** Agencies with an established presence prior to the 2022 escalation – such as IOM, UNHCR and IFRC – were well-positioned to scale up rapidly, drawing on their existing relationships with local authorities and civil society networks. These agencies demonstrated an ability to deliver at scale, particularly in hard-to-reach and war-affected areas, where national partners played a central role in last-mile delivery. UNHCR's work in community-based protection (CBP) and AGD-sensitive programming illustrates how pre-existing partnerships enabled contextually appropriate assistance.
201. Area-based coordination models, especially in frontline regions like Kharkiv, proved more effective and inclusive than centralised structures. These localised systems facilitated stronger engagement with municipal authorities and CSOs, enabling a more grounded and adaptive response. In contrast, national-level coordination remained overly centralised and bureaucratic, with limited inclusion of sub-national government actors beyond data collection. Government-led platforms were often inaccessible to civil society, while humanitarian structures were slow to shift from information-sharing to genuine operational coordination.
202. Fragmentation was exacerbated in some instances by parallel service delivery systems established by humanitarian actors. Humanitarian hubs often operated separately from state-run centres, such as SNAPs or free legal aid centres, which affected coherence and efficiency. While some agencies—such as UNICEF—worked in coordination with national and local authorities, including supporting formal education through government schools and reinforcing WASH services where government systems were functional, this approach was not uniformly adopted. In several cases, international systems worked around rather than through national structures, leading to duplication and missed opportunities to strengthen existing capacities and ensure complementarity.
203. Key informants interviewed confirmed that donor funding practices and coordination designs frequently prioritised international protocols over the existing Ukrainian institutional context. Coordination frameworks imported from other contexts (such as Pakistan) were ill-suited to

Ukraine's urbanised and digitalised governance. Consequently, international actors missed opportunities to integrate into functioning national systems, defaulting instead to parallel models that may have been appropriate in failed state contexts but not in a functioning middle-income country with a strong government.

204. Nonetheless, several initiatives demonstrated the potential for stronger integration with national systems. UNHCR coordinated with ministries at multiple levels – including on evacuations and return support – while WFP embedded national procurement into its operational model, with over 90% of food now sourced locally. WFP's collaboration with the Ministry of Social Policy to top up existing social protection benefits has also become a core component of its strategic plan. These efforts point to viable pathways for transitioning certain humanitarian functions to nationally owned systems. However, such approaches were not yet widespread across the response, and opportunities remain to further embed and expand nationally led mechanisms.
205. Cash assistance also highlighted both the potential and pitfalls of system integration. While MPCA reached millions and demonstrated the scalability of humanitarian tools, agencies raised concerns about whether cash programming remained an emergency response or should be transitioned into longer-term social protection schemes. The lack of strategic donor alignment on this question limited progress toward a nationally led model.
206. Capacity support efforts largely focused on programme delivery and meeting accountability standards, with less emphasis on longer-term institutional strengthening. Across the collective response, sustained investments in local leadership, governance, and systems strengthening were less evident, limiting the potential for long-term sustainability and nationally led response capacity.
207. **Alignment with local initiatives and national and local government plans and initiatives.** Alignment with national systems – particularly government priorities – improved over time but remained partial and often fragmented. Engagement with community-led or civil society-driven initiatives was minimal, especially at the strategic level.
208. National actors noted that coordination with international agencies often ran parallel to government mechanisms. In some cases, participation in central government-led platforms was limited for civil society organisations, creating a disconnect and making it more challenging for local civil society organisations to engage meaningfully across both spheres. In contrast, area-based coordination in frontline areas enabled more effective collaboration between local authorities, United Nations agencies and NGOs on response planning and delivery. Civil society representatives questioned the efficiency and prioritisation of some humanitarian programming and called for a clearer focus on dignity, transparency in pooled funding allocations, and investment in specialist expertise (e.g. in MHPSS).
209. Despite these concerns, evaluations show a gradual shift toward improved alignment with government priorities, particularly in sectors with clear state mandates such as social protection and school feeding. Engagement with national authorities on social protection and

sectoral policy alignment strengthened over time, despite some early challenges. Initial operations faced delays due to the absence of formal agreements, resulting in the need for parallel delivery systems. However, coordination with government counterparts gradually improved, enabling greater alignment with national frameworks, including in areas such as nutrition and cash-based assistance for vulnerable groups. In the normative and human rights space, cooperation with government institutions was generally constructive, though differences occasionally emerged regarding the framing of findings and recommendations. While such differences did not undermine the perceived impartiality or credibility of the work, they highlighted the sensitivities inherent in operating within a politically complex environment.

### 2.4.3. Systemic Fit of Cluster Coordination with Ukrainian Civil Society

210. **Finding:** The formal coordination system – particularly the cluster architecture – was only partially adapted to the Ukrainian context. Evaluations show that it often failed to engage informal or emerging CSOs meaningfully, especially in the initial phases of the response. Over time, progress was made in local co-leadership and alignment with area-based models, yet core power imbalances persisted. The cluster system’s fit within the Ukrainian context has remained a persistent point of friction throughout the response, although there were notable improvements over time but the overall disconnect limited both the effectiveness of coordination and the inclusion of a diverse set of civil society actors. (See also SQ 5 – 2.5 on IASC Coordination Model)
211. At the outset of the full-scale invasion in 2022, international humanitarian coordination mechanisms were rapidly deployed in Ukraine, with the full roll-out of the cluster system. While this mirrored global good practice, without adequate contextualisation, it did not sufficiently align with Ukraine’s institutional realities and already existing civil society coordination practices. Coordination approaches were seen as inappropriate for Ukraine’s context: a middle-income country with a functioning government, high levels of digital literacy, and a sophisticated civil society.
212. National NGOs and community-based CSOs, particularly those already active since 2014, reported being sidelined by these coordination models. Cluster meetings were often seen as not sufficiently focused on operational problem-solving.
213. Despite these shortcomings, some meaningful progress was achieved. UNHCR’s leadership of the Protection Cluster, supported by national NGO co-leads such as Right to Protection (R2P), demonstrated that structural inclusion was possible when intentionally pursued. OHCHR and the HRMMU also modelled alternative coordination approaches through bilateral relationships and coalition-building. Their work with national institutions, including the Ombudsman’s Office and the Ministry of Defence, provided a more embedded and context-sensitive framework for localisation.
214. Coordination was more effective where area-based models were adopted – particularly in frontline regions such as Kharkiv – where emergency hubs facilitated closer collaboration

between local authorities, international agencies, and national CSOs. These locally anchored structures allowed for more responsive, needs-based coordination and provided space for civil society engagement that felt more organic and relevant.

## 2.5 IASC Coordination Model in Ukraine and its Operational Delivery

**SQ 5:** To what extent do evaluations find the coordination model in Ukraine fit for purpose in the context? To what extent did it support operational delivery?

### 2.5.1. Internal Coherence

215. **Finding:** While the HRP provided overarching strategic objectives, the IASC coordination system in Ukraine lacked internal coherence in translating these into collective operational planning and delivery. At the inter-agency and cluster levels, there was no formal framework for area-based coordination, planning or shared outcomes, particularly for nexus coordination.
216. Evaluation reports indicate that, following the IASC system-wide scale-up activation, overlapping mandates and differing expectations among humanitarian response agencies generated tensions that complicated efforts to provide coherent and consistent support. These tensions stemmed in part from overlapping mandates and differing expectations among humanitarian response agencies. This situation seems to have hindered or delayed consensus on a number of strategic decisions.
217. Efforts to establish a coordination model for the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus evolved over time, with differing views on how best to align humanitarian coordination structures, area-based approaches, and nexus-specific initiatives. While various nexus coordination forums were in place, a more coherent and comprehensive approach—grounded in collective action—was still needed to effectively link clusters, area-based management, and nexus coordination mechanisms.
- ~~218.~~ The appointment of an inter-agency coordinator to promote tri-cluster synergies, coordination and collaboration among three specific humanitarian clusters that are closely interlinked in delivering services was a missed opportunity to strengthen broader inter-agency coordination, including through clusters and technical working groups. Some inter-agency coordination efforts aimed to promote synergies across clusters, recognising that siloed approaches limited the effectiveness of assistance. However, evaluation findings suggest that while this intention was present, it may have been implemented prematurely and may have required more senior leadership to be effective in promoting tri-cluster synergies.
219. The ICRC, as an observer in the cluster system, engaged bilaterally with United Nations agencies to avoid duplication and support complementarity, particularly in areas like protection, access negotiations and the winter response.
220. There was a lack of clarity on transitioning the coordination of the response to a national leadership. While UNHCR supported the efforts of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator through participation in the Community Planning for Durable Solutions and Recovery Working Group, the shift to a government-led and locally rooted coordination mechanism should have been prioritised earlier.

### 2.5.2. The Cluster System

221. **Finding:** While each of the clusters engaged with relevant government departments and ministries, a clear transition plan and collective action by the IASC system were needed to place humanitarian coordination under national co-leadership early in the response.
222. Several clusters demonstrated strong technical capacity and service delivery. However, challenges remained in ensuring inclusive leadership, strategic integration across clusters and a progressive transition to nationally led or integrated mechanisms.
223. WFP played a key role in supporting the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications (ET) clusters through resource allocation, staffing and provision of common services, which significantly strengthened the collective emergency response. WFP expanded its support to the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster, provided common information management, and offered on-demand cash transfer services in 2023. Stakeholders reported that these clusters offered key services, for example, by finding innovative solutions to internet connectivity challenges across the country.
224. Despite these strengths, formal NGO co-facilitation was not established in WFP-led clusters, such as Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications (ET), which remained solely led by WFP across all areas. In the case of the Logistics Cluster, this reflected a 2018 agreement at HQ level between WFP and OCHA that, due to WFP's global leadership in humanitarian logistics, full co-leadership would not apply, with co-facilitation being the alternative model. In Ukraine, WFP reported that no NGOs, INGOs, or national counterparts—such as Civil Protection or relevant ministries—had requested to co-facilitate the cluster. While this may reflect the operational context, including WFP's technical mandate, some stakeholders noted that more formalised co-facilitation arrangements could have further supported localisation and broadened shared ownership. Notably, data show that the cluster maintained diverse stakeholder engagement across multiple actor categories.
225. UNHCR, by scaling up its coordination leadership in 2022, supported the Protection, Shelter/NFI and CCCM clusters to fulfil many of their core coordination functions. Dedicated focal points were put in place to facilitate collaboration between these clusters, promoting cross-sectoral responses to civilian harm, infrastructure attacks, emergency supply distribution, and winterisation needs. These linkages ensured that protection considerations informed operational responses.
226. Over time, all three UNHCR-led clusters strengthened their engagement with local actors, reflecting a positive trajectory in localisation efforts. Nonetheless, the system as a whole lacked a unified transition strategy to progressively hand over cluster coordination responsibilities to national authorities, limiting opportunities to build nationally owned coordination mechanisms from the outset.

### 2.5.3. Operational Coordination

227. **Finding:** Operational coordination among agencies was mixed. While some effective partnerships and joint initiatives were established, gaps remained in joint assessments, strategic alignment and coherence across inter-agency mechanisms.
228. WFP established several highly relevant operational partnerships with other United Nations agencies and some civil society actors. These included food security assessments and the demining pilot project with FAO, GBV with UNFPA, and on assessments with REACH, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the Kyiv School of Economics. WFP also engaged with the multi-agency PeReHID Initiative to support government reforms in social protection.
229. WFP facilitated inter-agency convoys that were made available to all humanitarian actors, with twenty organizations, mainly NGOs, participating.
230. UNHCR was proactive in leading and contributing to a range of other inter-agency forums for the delivery of short-term humanitarian assistance as well as designing and delivering longer-term recovery solutions. However, evaluations recognised that UNHCR could have more effectively advocated on orienting the delivery of assistance and protection through cash-based interventions and away from the distribution of NFIs.
231. UNHCR resourced the Protection Cluster, ensuring adequate geographic coverage that was supported by active local NGO engagement. However, challenges in attributing and coordinating the Areas of Responsibility among protection cluster members in 2022 and into 2023 partly undermined the effectiveness and coherence of some of the cluster's functions.

#### 2.5.4. Joint Advocacy

232. No evidence was found in the available evaluations of joint advocacy at the HCT level. During the complementary interviews, some joint initiatives at the cluster level were mentioned, but no specific examples were provided.

## SECTION 3. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluations reviewed for this synthesis provide a snapshot of the humanitarian responses delivered by IASC members, based on each agency's evaluation questions and corresponding findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This analysis enabled the identification of common trends, lessons, and areas for improvement to support the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in strengthening the response in Ukraine. The synthesis recognises the evolving needs and priorities resulting from the ongoing war and the fluid operational context, as well as the continued efforts by IASC members to respond as effectively as possible. A targeted stakeholder consultation helped to contextualise the synthesis within the current operating environment.

### 3.1 High-level Conclusions

233. The humanitarian response in Ukraine demonstrated the international system's capacity for rapid mobilization and large-scale delivery, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the 2022 escalation. Millions were reached through protection, cash assistance, food security and shelter interventions. However, the response was more effective in meeting immediate needs than in enabling strategic transition, resilience or sustainable outcomes. Systemic weaknesses – including limited intersectional targeting, persistent reliance on in-kind modalities, fragmented programme integration, and the absence of a coherent transition strategy – undermined longer-term impact.
234. The coordination model, though quickly activated and expanded to include some local co-leadership, remained poorly adapted to Ukraine's government-led, decentralized, middle-income context. Standard cluster mechanisms operated largely in parallel to national systems, overlooking existing capacities in decentralised administration and civil society. This mismatch limited both strategic alignment and operational efficiency. Emerging innovations – such as area-based coordination and bilateral partnerships with local authorities – offered more context-responsive alternatives.
235. Humanitarian coordination was not fully fit for purpose in Ukraine's complex and government-led context. Coordination structures remained largely delivery-focused and struggled to align strategically with national systems or adapt effectively to sub-national variations. The lack of early planning for national co-leadership and limited integration of feedback mechanisms constrained the system's ability to support a transition from humanitarian action to recovery and system strengthening. As a result, coordination fell short of enabling a genuinely collective, inclusive and forward-looking response strategy.

### 3.2 Strategic Conclusions for Government-led Contexts with Active and Capable Civil Society



236. These concern how the humanitarian system must evolve at the structural and policy level to remain effective in government-led, middle-income and politically complex contexts.
237. **The Ukrainian response underscored the need to recalibrate humanitarian models for government-led contexts.** It demonstrated that the humanitarian system can operate at scale in a middle-income country with functioning institutions. However, it also exposed the limitations of models built for fragile or collapsed state environments. In Ukraine, where state institutions remained active and engaged despite the war, traditional substitute service delivery approaches were often misaligned with the operational reality. More effective responses supported and complemented national systems, embedding assistance within planning frameworks and working in close collaboration with government actors..
238. **Local leadership played a pivotal role in the nationally led crisis response.** Civil society and national actors—including first responders—were instrumental, especially early in the war and in hard-to-reach areas. Their mobilisation filled urgent gaps before international actors scaled up. While there were efforts to foster inclusive partnerships and co-leadership, these remained limited. Localisation risks stalling unless it moves beyond subcontracting to genuine leadership in coordination, strategic planning, and funding governance.
239. **A short-term delivery focus limited the Ukraine response’s potential to build longer-term sustainability from the outset.** Despite recognition of the need to link humanitarian action with recovery and resilience, the response remained oriented toward immediate delivery. This missed key opportunities to align early with national systems and lay the groundwork for transition. The lack of multi-year planning, flexible financing, and shared accountability with development actors further constrained the response’s long-term impact.
240. **Ukraine’s response revealed the need for coordination models that reflect the complexities of government-led crisis settings.** While existing mechanisms facilitated scale-up and information sharing, they often fell short in enabling a collective strategy or aligning with national systems. This was due in part to the limited adaptability of standard coordination models. Nonetheless, humanitarian actors complemented state-led efforts and sustained services where government capacity was stretched. Area-based coordination and national co-leadership emerged as promising alternatives, offering lessons for more flexible and inclusive coordination.
241. **The Ukraine crisis demonstrated adaptability under pressure, but also revealed weaknesses in collective preparedness and scenario planning.** Although regional assets and pre-positioned actors were in place, early warning did not fully translate into operational readiness and scenario-based planning. The response demonstrated the importance of risk-informed preparedness systems and agile models that can pivot quickly as conditions evolve.
242. **The Ukrainian response highlighted the operational value of sustained engagement with government counterparts, while also revealing the sensitivities around neutrality in politicised environments.** Engagement with the Government of Ukraine facilitated the effective delivery of support and access to affected populations. However, this operational

proximity also generated tensions around perceptions of neutrality and independence. The experience highlights the importance of clearly defined roles, transparent coordination frameworks, and independent needs assessments in upholding humanitarian principles. In highly politicised contexts, navigating the balance between constructive government engagement and the preservation of impartiality and access remains a complex but necessary endeavour.

### 3.3 Operational Conclusions

243. **The speed and scale of the Ukraine response at times outpaced systems for ensuring equity and accountability.** The humanitarian response in Ukraine benefited from rapid mobilisation, enabled by surge capacity, pre-financing, and existing operational infrastructure. However, this pace often outstripped systems for inclusive targeting, real-time adaptation, and accountability. Mechanisms for disaggregated data collection and feedback were not consistently embedded, limiting the responsiveness of programmes to the needs of diverse population groups. This imbalance between speed and systems reveals a persistent tension in emergency responses between operational urgency and equitable delivery.
244. **The scale of cash programming in Ukraine outpaced the systems needed to sustain and adapt it.** Ukraine featured one of the largest MPCA rollouts globally, but institutional procedures and donor requirements undermined the flexibility required for timely and adaptive cash responses. The absence of a shared strategic vision on whether MPCA should function primarily as an emergency response mechanism or a bridge to longer-term social protection instrument contributed to missed opportunities for integration with national systems. MPCA was often delivered as a one-off amount transfer, which limited its capacity to adapt to varying beneficiary needs and evolving contexts.
245. **Protection achieved broad reach but was not systematically integrated across sectors.** Protection interventions in Ukraine reached large numbers of displaced and vulnerable individuals, underscoring the strength of dedicated programming. However, mainstreaming of protection—particularly related to age, gender, and disability inclusion—remained inconsistent. While some sectors incorporated protection principles into design and monitoring, others did so unevenly or as an afterthought. This experience points to the challenges of embedding protection as a cross-cutting concern that is responsive to the evolving risks and needs of affected populations.
246. **Standard coordination approaches at times lacked the flexibility and accessibility needed to support inclusive and locally relevant action.** In Ukraine, the cluster system facilitated information exchange and operational alignment but was often perceived as overly centralised and difficult for local actors to access. Coordination mechanisms did not consistently drive joint planning or geographical coherence, particularly in the early phases. In contrast, sub-national and area-based coordination closer to affected communities proved more effective in enhancing reach and complementarity. The experience showed the value of more flexible,

context-driven coordination structures, particularly in settings where national and local capacities remain strong.

247. **Localisation progressed in delivery but remained limited as a strategic pillar of the response.** The Ukraine response saw notable increases in funding to national actors, with some UN agencies directing the majority of partner budgets to local NGOs. However, these gains were often instrumental—driven by delivery imperatives—rather than grounded in a longer-term commitment to partnership. Co-leadership, joint planning, and investment in sustainable local capacities were not consistently embedded in the response architecture. As a result, opportunities to strengthen national leadership and ownership beyond implementation were underutilised.
248. **Where humanitarian delivery aligned with national systems, results were more sustainable and better integrated.** Examples from Ukraine demonstrated that coordination with national structures—such as social registries, education systems, and local government platforms—enabled smoother delivery and stronger links to existing services. Agencies that worked through or alongside these systems were better positioned to support local ownership and ensure continuity. The experience highlighted the value of building on national capacities in settings with functional institutions, especially at sub-national levels where needs and systems intersect.

## SECTION 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are addressed to the HCT in Ukraine. It should be noted, however, the many of the lessons from this synthesis are relevant to collective humanitarian responses elsewhere and that will occur in the future.

### 5.1 Seven recommendations towards a strategic reset of the humanitarian response in Ukraine

**1. Adapt coordination models through the Reset process to ensure they are fully aligned with the Ukrainian context and operational realities.** Leverage the Humanitarian Reset process to meaningfully adapt coordination structures, making them leaner, more operational, and suited to Ukraine's middle-income, decentralised and digitalised context. Build on the success of area-based coordination and sub-national platforms to enhance responsiveness, empower local leadership, and engage civil society in a more structured and sustained way.

**2. Advance localisation by moving from service delivery roles to shared decision-making and leadership with national actors.** Consolidate gains in funding to national actors by reforming mechanisms to enable direct, flexible, and multi-year support to local NGOs. Move beyond subcontracting by promoting national actors as co-leaders in strategic planning, coordination, and accountability. Strengthen long-term, trust-based partnerships as a foundation for sustainable localisation.

**3. Prioritise and support national leadership within coordination structures to strengthen ownership and sustainability.** In Ukraine, internationally led coordination structures enabled a rapid, large-scale response in the early phase. Evaluation evidence shows that national and local actors can assume greater leadership. Shifting towards co-leadership and alignment with national systems would strengthen ownership, sustainability, and coherence across the response.

**4. Re-establish strategic coherence by setting collective goals, defining common outcomes and agreeing on clear priorities.** Strengthen the HCT's leadership role in defining shared objectives across sectors, aligning with national frameworks, and supporting geographic and thematic coherence. Coordination must move beyond information exchange to address strategic challenges and facilitate joint prioritisation. The Reset offers a crucial opportunity to reframe the response around collective outcomes and coherent transition pathways, helping to rebalance speed with equity and sustainability.

**5. Embed transition and sustainability planning into sector strategies to support long-term recovery and resilience.** Each cluster and operational partner should identify practical transition pathways in collaboration with relevant government actors. Integrate recovery and resilience objectives within humanitarian strategies, particularly in sectors like social protection, education, and protection. Institutionalise nexus approaches within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle to improve alignment with national recovery and development frameworks..

**6. Ensure humanitarian principles, protection and Accountability to Affected People are systematically upheld across all aspects of the Ukraine response.** This requires strengthening principled decision-making through scenario planning, documentation of trade-offs, and clearly defined engagement frameworks. Ensure that protection, PSEA, and AAP are embedded as cross-cutting priorities across sectors, backed by dedicated leadership, resources, and meaningful partnerships with local actors. Reinforce the role of independent needs analysis and inclusive monitoring in upholding impartiality and access.

**7. Strengthen shared, secure and interoperable data systems.** Develop a joint data and analysis architecture that connects humanitarian and national systems while ensuring data protection and privacy. Enable shared vulnerability analysis, equitable targeting, and alignment across humanitarian, development, and social service actors. Greater data coherence will support more accountable, responsive, and cost-effective programming during and beyond the Reset.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
AGD	Age, Gender, Diversity
CBT	Cash-Based Transfers
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FLAs	Field-Level Agreements
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
HRMMU	Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HQ	Headquarters
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
IAHE SG	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons

IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MG	Management Group (Inter-Agency Management Group)
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MPCA	Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance
MSNA	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
NGCAs	Non-Government Controlled Areas
NFIs	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPR	Operational Peer Review
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RC	Resident Coordinator
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SQs	Synthesis Questions
SSAFE	Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (The UN Refugee Agency)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme



# ANNEXES

Annex A. Terms of Reference

Annex B. Analytical Framework

Annex C. List of Evaluated Reports and Data Sources

Annex D. Methodology and Limitations

Annex E. Figures and Tables

Annex F. List of Stakeholders Interviewed

Annex G. Additional Information on Cash-Based Assistance