

The state of communication, community engagement and accountability across the Ukraine response

Snapshot report

Third edition. February 2023



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List of acronyms

AAP	accountability to affected people
CCEA	communication, community engagement and accountability
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities
CwC	communication with communities
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
MSNA	multi-sector needs assessment
NGO	non-governmental organisation

Introduction

As humanitarians prepare for a massive scale-up in 2023 to meet the needs of 17.6 million people affected by the conflict in Ukraine,¹ a spotlight on two-way communication and engagement with communities is paramount to ensure efficient, effective and accountable delivery of assistance.

Since May 2022, CDAC Network has provided quarterly [snapshots of the status of communication, community engagement and accountability \(CCEA\)](#) across the Ukraine response. Over the last three quarters, significant progress has been made by local, national and international responders to rapidly establish coordination systems, provide life-saving information to affected people and set up feedback mechanisms across the region.

This **third edition** of the snapshot report covers progress and remaining gaps and barriers observed during October–December 2022, with recommendations to improve collective CCEA efforts (see Figure 1).² This report focuses on the experience of national and local organisations working with community engagement and accountability structures. It was informed by desk research as well as 35 key informant interviews held in December 2022, representing 20 local/national and 11 international organisations in Ukraine, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.³

The report is accompanied by a [supplementary annex and interactive dashboard](#) of current CCEA activities in Ukraine and border countries.

Summary of findings

- Failure to recognise the diversity of refugee and host communities in communication strategies risks fuelling social tensions.
- Navigating the sheer volume of online information and identifying trusted sources is an increasing challenge that demands greater resources.
- Intermittent or no access to internet and phone networks has limited responder engagement with local people.
- Sustained prioritisation of online information means reduced access for significant numbers of affected people.
- Language continues to be a barrier to affected people accessing information and services.

1 OCHA (2022) [Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023](#).

2 This report has been compiled as part of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)-funded CDAC project, 'Collective action on CCEA in the Ukraine response' – an initiative that aims to strengthen predictable and coherent CCEA and bridge capacities to drive change at the system level.

3 The sample consisted of 12 international and 19 local and national organisations. Of these, 3 were based in Hungary; 2 in Moldova; 5 in Poland; 1 in Romania; 2 in Slovakia; 12 in Ukraine; and 6 covered regional responses.

- There has been slow but steady progress to improve local and national participation in international coordination structures.
- Local and national actors lack ownership of feedback mechanisms, leading to weak uptake and dissatisfaction.
- Intentional inclusion of people often disproportionately disadvantaged is not given due consideration in feedback mechanisms.

Figure 1 **Summary of recommendations for strengthening communication, community engagement and accountability in the Ukraine response**



Findings on CCEA gaps and barriers

This section provides additional detail on the key CCEA gaps and barriers observed in October–December 2022, with focus on CCEA coordination structures, two-way communication and other activities to meet the CCEA needs of affected people. Key recommendations for responders are included for each finding.

Finding 1: Failure to recognise the diversity of refugee and host communities in communication strategies risks fuelling social tensions

In border countries, informants noted anecdotal evidence that social tensions are on the rise between refugees and host communities, as well as between refugees of different ethnic backgrounds that now co-exist in communal settings.⁴ Communication and engagement strategies have generally focused on women and children from Ukrainian-speaking areas, which informants felt no longer adequately addressed the diversity of refugee groups trying to integrate into diverse host communities.

Informants from local organisations in border countries also raised concerns around host communities' perceptions of being excluded from service provision and feelings of resentment towards refugees. Many local actors that were active in their communities prior to the conflict shifted their work to support the response and meet the needs of refugees – often at the cost of previously served local communities. Ongoing dialogue with host communities is needed to mitigate tensions and alleviate the pressures of protracted displacement.

Recommendations

- Draw on local partners with existing community relationships to strengthen social cohesion and bridge divides.
- Proactively engage with local authorities and media to provide consistent and accurate information to mitigate tensions and rumours.

Finding 2: Navigating the sheer volume of online information is an increasing challenge that demands greater resources

At this stage of the response, information – particularly online information – is readily available for affected people across response countries. However, the sheer volume of information is increasingly causing confusion among affected people and responders are warning of the potential spread of mis- and disinformation. Some informants felt the main challenge now facing users is navigating the volume of

⁴ Based on key informant interviews with responders in border countries conducted by CDAC Network. See also: UNHCR & REACH (2022); TOKFM.pl (2022) [W Warszawie stworzyli Centrum Społeczności Romskich. 'Nie ma żadnego wsparcia ani nawet dialogu ze strony rządu'](#), 23 November.

information shared online and identifying sources they can trust.⁵ For example, 57% of affected people in Hungary reported not knowing where to look for the information they need, and 29% said they did not trust the information that they did find.⁶ Affected people in Moldova similarly noted that social media channels are overloaded and not an efficient source of information.⁷

While information needs have been generally lower in border countries over the last quarter,⁸ there remain certain information gaps. As was observed in July–September 2022,⁹ refugees in border countries still report needing *trusted* information on topics related to integrating in host communities, including on:¹⁰

- cash assistance
- employment opportunities
- medical care
- legal assistance
- finding accommodation
- access to healthcare services.

Within Ukraine, about 15% of affected people still indicate unmet needs for information or communication.¹¹ However, this nationwide figure hides huge disparities across the country: in some oblasts, as many as 48% of affected people report such needs.¹² Reflecting the escalation of fighting and airstrikes, information needs on the following topics were reported as priorities in the last quarter:¹³

- evacuation processes
- services available at transit points and final destinations
- rights as displaced persons
- what assistance is available and when; how to apply for and access aid.

5 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network. See also: UNHCR Romania (2023) [Situation overview in Bucharest, area-based assessment, September–October 2022](#); UNHCR Hungary (2022) [Regional refugee response for the Ukraine situation – multi-sectoral needs assessment](#).

6 UNHCR Hungary (2022).

7 UNHCR Romania (2023); Internews (2023) Unpublished research, January.

8 CDAC key informant interviews; see also UNHCR Hungary (2022).

9 CDAC Network (2022) [The state of communication, community engagement and accountability across the Ukraine response](#), 2nd edition, September.

10 UNHCR (2022) [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland – profiling update](#), November; UNHCR & REACH (2022) [Romania multi-sector needs assessment](#), December; UNHCR, IOM & REACH (2022) [Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine situation – site monitoring and on-site needs assessment: Slovakia](#), October.

11 IOM (2022) [Ukraine returns report #3, 25 November–5 December](#).

12 CESVI, Concern & Medicos del Mundo (2022) [Ukraine crisis multisector needs assessment](#), December.

13 CESVI et al. (2022); Nonviolent Peaceforce (2022) [Kherson rapid assessment: civilian protection needs & responses](#).

Recommendations

- Focus on signposting, curating and amplifying trusted online information on the most in-demand topics.
- Consistently engage with user comments on social media posts to foster trust and help prevent the spread of misinformation.
- Promote up-to-date, verified information on social media feeds for people to share.

Finding 3: Intermittent or no access to internet and phone networks has limited responder engagement with local people

Regular attacks on critical infrastructure affected millions of people across Ukraine during the last quarter, disrupting connectivity, electricity, water and heating. In November 2022, there were reports that Ukraine's energy system was unable to supply as much as 50% of its residents' energy needs.¹⁴ Intermittent or no access to internet or phone networks has prevented responders from communicating with local partners and affected people for extended durations, hindering delivery of critical assistance.¹⁵

These connectivity issues in the last quarter have challenged humanitarianism's heavy reliance on mobile devices and wireless internet for CCEA activities in Ukraine to date. While there are vast quantities of information online – particularly on Telegram and other social media channels – power cuts and connectivity issues meant these sources were no longer reliable or even accessible for many in Ukraine. This was compounded for those who are physically unable to access charging points or who are generally unable to use or lack mobile devices.¹⁶ Understanding and engaging with the full spectrum of communication channels that people trust and use is essential to enable information to flow around blockages.¹⁷

Recommendations

- Understand and engage with the full spectrum of communication channels that people trust and use, including media and non-digital forms of public information.
- Continuously engage with and support media actors in Ukraine that understand who trusts and uses which channels to build resilient communication and engagement strategies.

14 BBC News (2022) [Ukraine war: Ukraine struggles to restore power after Russian strikes](#), 24 November.

15 IRC (2022) [Winter in Ukraine: over 25% of internally displaced people interviewed lack access to sufficient heating, more than 60% houses damaged, IRC initial analysis shows](#), press release, 20 December; Nonviolent Peaceforce (2022).

16 Nonviolent Peaceforce (2022).

17 CDAC Network (2022) [Ukraine in the dark: what to do when power cuts disrupt communication and engagement strategies](#), December.

Finding 4: Sustained prioritisation of online information means reduced access

Online information has also been prioritised by responders outside of Ukraine, with a steady increase in digital platforms being developed in the last quarter.¹⁸ While online sources have provided opportunities for affected people to interact with humanitarian services and provide feedback, key informants noted that the prioritisation of online channels continues to exclude certain affected people due to issues around digital literacy and language barriers.¹⁹

Access issues related to online information are nuanced across border countries and different contexts. For example, refugees in Poland reportedly face fewer challenges accessing information, due to Poland having a large Ukrainian diaspora, while refugees in Romania and Moldova who rely more on online sources for information face greater challenges to access.²⁰ There are also differences between affected people settled in collective sites, where there is greater access to information in multiple formats and not online only, than those dispersed in private accommodation.²¹ Informants urged the use of multiple channels of information across border countries, including non-digital forms of public information like posters and flyers, to ensure all people have access to the information they need.

Informants from organisations working in rural areas also noted that information access and engagement is inadequate, particularly for refugees living alone and in areas with limited transport. Similar concerns around information access were raised by informants from organisations supporting people with disabilities, noting that information is rarely provided in accessible communication formats.

Recommendations

- Provide two-way communication in a variety of online and offline formats and languages.
- Consult people in marginalised communities to better understand how information should be provided.
- Ensure those working directly with marginalised groups have up-to-date information to provide.

Finding 5: Language continues to be a barrier to information and services

While information and services are increasingly provided in Ukrainian language across border countries, there remain critical gaps around translation and interpretation in other languages. For example, nearly half of affected people in Hungary felt that information is available but not accessible due to language barriers.²² In Romania, where the majority (69%) of the refugee community are Russian-speaking, language was reported as a cross-cutting barrier to accessing information and services.²³ The continuing lack of Russian translation, as well as translation into marginalised languages, risks missing vast numbers of refugees.

18 See [supplementary annex](#).

19 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network. See also: UNHCR Hungary (2022).

20 CLEAR Global (2022) Unpublished report; for reference, see: UNHCR (2022) [AAP WG meeting minutes, 8 December](#).

21 UNHCR Hungary (2022).

22 Hungary (2022).

23 UNHCR Romania (2023).

There has been some outreach by humanitarian actors to local organisations working with ethnic majority groups to support the translation of materials. However, local organisations reportedly feel overwhelmed by the demand, as English remains the default language for the majority of written documents. Humanitarians must prioritise appropriate support and resourcing for partner organisations undertaking translation.

Translation, interpretation and use of plain language is as important when engaging with local and national partners as it is with affected communities.²⁴ Some informants have noted inconsistent translations of terminology – even within the same document – leading to confusion, misunderstanding and the inability of local partners to engage fully in partnerships and coordination processes.

Recommendations

- Prioritise translation of official information into Russian, Ukrainian and marginalised languages, with other information services and online platforms directing refugees to those sources.
- Invest in accurate and consistent translations through use of professional translation services. Emphasise the use of plain language.

Finding 6: Slow but steady progress to improve local and national participation in international coordination structures

Since the establishment of international structures mandated to coordinate CCEA in the response, there have been persistent barriers to improving local and national participation.²⁵ In the last quarter, Cluster and Working Group meetings – namely Accountability to Affected People (AAP), Protection and Cash (and some subgroups for Communication with Communities (CwC)) – have doubled down on efforts to address these barriers. More meetings are delivered in local languages,²⁶ documents translated, and technical terminology reframed to encourage a common understanding of CCEA. Many hold in-person meetings, which are generally preferred by local and national actors.²⁷ In-person AAP workshops held in Moldova and Poland during this quarter were referenced by stakeholders as good practice examples of engaging, informal spaces for local, national and international actors to share common challenges and solutions and foster a sense of trust and mutual understanding.²⁸

Despite these efforts, there is anecdotal evidence that interest from local and national participants to take part in the current international coordination system appears to be waning. This is largely due to practical issues around language barriers, the continued use of hard-to-understand terminology, and perceptions

24 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network. See also: DEC (2023) [Options for supporting and strengthening local humanitarian action in Ukraine: a scoping exercise report](#), January.

25 See: CDAC Network (2022) [The state of communication, community engagement and accountability across the Ukraine response](#), 2nd edition, September.

26 However, these tend to be one-off meetings and workshops rather than the regular meetings.

27 UNHCR Poland (2022), [AAP WG meeting minutes, 10 November](#).

28 Workshops were co-facilitated by CDAC Network.

that meetings are ‘top-down’ and that opinions and ideas of local and national actors are not adequately considered.²⁹ Other barriers to participation included irregular meeting times (or changes at short notice), lack of meeting structure, and high frequency of meetings for low-staffed agencies.

Recommendations

- Include local and national actors in meeting planning, with documentation such as meeting minutes provided in relevant languages.
- Consider forging alternative pathways between local/national and international coordination mechanisms that would require lower time commitment and resources to participate fully.
- Encourage dialogue on CCEA topics and issues through inter-agency forums that are open and inclusive of international, national and local actors, as well as multi-sector stakeholders.

Finding 7: Local and national actors lack ownership of feedback mechanisms, leading to weak uptake and dissatisfaction

There has been a concerted effort to establish feedback mechanisms across the response. Most actors now have at least one way of collecting feedback through online tools and social media platforms, along with a variety of other modalities like QR codes, hotlines, chatbots, email and face-to-face interviews.³⁰

However, informants from local organisations noted that feedback mechanisms are designed according to established international practices, and few are shared or co-designed with local and national actors. This has led to low sense of ownership of these mechanisms by local and national actors, with some seeing their role as simply enumerators that contribute to an existing system. This perceived and real lack of involvement has weakened uptake and trust in feedback mechanisms by some local and national actors.

Another source of dissatisfaction was local partners not being adequately informed on how feedback data influences programme decision-making. Perceptions around the extractive nature of collecting feedback without implementing changes, resulting in services that are not relevant to refugees’ needs, have also reduced some local actors’ interest to engage.

Recommendations

- Focus on outreach and participatory design of feedback mechanisms with local and national actors to improve uptake and ownership of the processes.
- Inform people of their right to provide feedback and various methods to do so.

29 Based on key informant interviews conducted by CDAC Network. See also: priorities referenced in DEC (2023).

30 See [supplementary annex](#) for an overview of feedback mechanisms implemented by organisations in each country.

Finding 8: Intentional inclusion of people often disproportionately disadvantaged is not given due consideration in feedback mechanisms

Informants reported an increase in face-to-face assessments and focus group discussions at collective centres in border countries, but there are concerns that these processes may not be providing representative insights. Local and national organisations in Ukraine and Poland working with refugees living in private accommodation noted that the people they support are not fully reflected in the feedback collected.

Informants also cited other inclusion concerns around some people needing extra support to participate in feedback, as well as assurance that feedback would not result in negative consequences for themselves or others.

In Ukraine, older people and people living in rural areas appeared to be particularly excluded from feedback. Surveys conducted by Ground Truth Solutions in Ukraine indicated that most people in Ukraine did not know how to provide feedback on aid and that this was most prevalent among older people and people living in rural areas. Low awareness has contributed to only 4% of people aged 60 and over providing any feedback.³¹

Recommendations

- Provide clear, safe and accessible feedback mechanisms that consider diverse needs.
- Inform people of their right to provide feedback and the various methods to do so.

31 Ground Truth Solutions (2022) [Perceptions of aid in Ukraine – quantitative findings round 1](#), Bulletin 1, December.

Conclusion

Substantial progress has been made to effectively scale CCEA efforts across the region, mostly in the roll-out of feedback systems. However, some persistent gaps and barriers remain around: the accessibility of online information and identification of trusted sources; addressing language barriers; inclusion considerations for marginalised groups and host communities; and sustained engagement of local and national actors in coordination structures.

Many of these gaps could be addressed through a collaborative design approach that recognises and harnesses the CCEA-related skills, knowledge and capacities of diverse local, national and international organisations, as well as media, government, civil society and diaspora- and refugee-led organisations. As the response continues to scale up in 2023, emphasis on sharing CCEA best practices and bridging local-international expertise can accelerate progress to meet growing humanitarian needs.



CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

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