

House Oversight Committee Subcommittee on National Security
“The U.S. and International Humanitarian Response to Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine”
June 10, 2022

Statement of Amanda Catanzano, Vice President (acting), Global Policy and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

100 Days of War in Ukraine: European Conflict; Global Fallout

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing on the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine. The Subcommittee’s efforts to examine the global implications of this conflict and the humanitarian crisis it has wrought is both admirable and critical.

I am speaking on behalf of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC is a humanitarian organization We are providing aid in Ukraine, supporting refugees across the border in Poland and onward in Europe, and preparing to support Ukrainian parolees arriving in the United States via the Uniting for Ukraine initiative.

The impact of this inhumane war is, of course, felt most directly by Ukrainians - thousands of whom have been killed and injured and millions more who have lost their jobs, their homes, and their hope. But effects of this conflict are also reverberating around the world. It is vital that we shine a light on how the war is devastating the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people in Africa, the Middle East, and Central America and tipping the scale towards famine and instability.

The IRC applauds Congress for generously allocating over \$4 billion in humanitarian funding for Ukraine and for global food insecurity in last month’s Emergency Supplemental. By building on that important step, with innovative funding and robust humanitarian diplomacy, the US can ease suffering inside Ukraine while also offering solidarity with refugee-hosting communities in Europe and managing global hunger fallout. But the need today is not just for more aid; it is for accountability in Ukraine and beyond. The brutal and lawless conduct of this war is driving these needs.

The conflict is just over 100 days old. Yet the dynamics of death, destruction, displacement, and denial of humanitarian access have been catastrophic for civilians. The humanitarian response is still in the emergency phase. But we can anticipate a protracted conflict with civilian and humanitarian impacts that will last a generation. As donors and implementing partners sprint in these early days, we must be ready for the marathon to come. My testimony today will focus on concrete actions to alleviate suffering today and to prepare for the long-term and global repercussions of this war.

Responding across the Arc of Crisis

Inside Ukraine, the IRC is providing emergency aid and services to those displaced by the fighting. We are partnering with local organizations to deliver multi-purpose cash to income-deprived Ukrainians and to offer protection services to traumatized women and children. We are coordinating with the Ministry of Health to support clinics and hospitals struggling to procure medicines and other life-saving supplies.

In Poland, which hosts the most Ukrainian refugees in the fastest-moving refugee crisis since the [Second World War](#), the IRC is delivering [cash support](#) to refugee families in Warsaw, to ensure they can buy food,

medicine, clothing and other essentials. Our partner-centered approach supports, rather than supplants, the laudable relief efforts of the Polish government, civil society, and the private sector. The IRC and our partners are providing information services, legal counseling, and psychological support.

In Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova, the IRC is supporting Ukrainians seeking safety and opportunity. In the United States, we are preparing to support Ukrainian parolees with legal services, school enrollment, language access, and other needs that may arise as the Uniting for Ukraine program takes off and sponsors begin to welcome Ukrainian families.

In the nearly 40 other countries where the IRC works, the knock-on effects of this crisis are pushing communities already dependent on humanitarian aid further into debt, hunger, and misery. IRC staff on the ground have already been responding to a toxic mix of conflict, COVID-19, and climate change that pushed displacement and humanitarian needs to record levels this year. Now we are racing to support populations as price hikes push food out of reach for many families, fuel shortages and rising prices threaten power for health facilities and transportation of aid, and severe underfunding of humanitarian responses risks depriving millions of the assistance they need and deserve.

Ground Zero: Ukraine

While the fallout from this conflict may be felt globally, Ukraine is ground zero. The war is devastating the country's people, infrastructure, and economy. And despite the mobilization of massive levels of funding, the ability of humanitarians to respond is limited by insecurity, shifting lines of control, and denial of access.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been a horrifying hallmark of this conflict, killing or injuring at least [9,000 civilians](#), including an average of 2 children killed and 4 injured each day. Healthcare facilities have come under fire on average twice daily – with more than [200 health facilities](#) attacked. Damage to health and water infrastructure will likely increase the prevalence of infectious diseases, while reducing access to treatment.

Nearly 14 million Ukrainians have fled their homes – including [two thirds of all Ukrainian children](#). [6.8 million](#) Ukrainians are outside of Ukraine and [7.1 million](#) are displaced within the country. Most Ukrainians left their homes with few belongings and are cut off from family and social support systems, sheltering in over-crowded reception and collective centers. All told, nearly [16 million](#) people inside Ukraine are still in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

The economic impacts have been just as dire and will linger long after the war ends. [Half](#) of Ukraine's businesses have shut down, costing nearly [5 million jobs](#). The World Bank predicts the Ukrainian economy will shrink by [half](#) this year. Each day of this war has cost \$1 billion in infrastructure damage - [\\$100 billion](#) so far and counting. The UN Development Program warns that [90% of Ukrainians](#) could fall below the poverty line - erasing two decades of economic growth.

Needs are most severe in the contested areas in Ukraine's south and east, where the fighting is currently concentrated and where populations remain under siege. Hundreds of thousands are trapped amidst the fighting or unable to leave due to destruction of bridges and roads. Widespread destruction of infrastructure has left many without access to basic services. [1.4 million](#) people lack running water and supplies of food, fuel, and medicine are running out. Unable to meet basic needs, civilians are resorting to negative coping strategies, such as cutting down on meals or limiting portion sizes. IRC partners, who

are working around the clock to provide assistance to their communities, report that families arriving at their offices are hopeless, traumatized, and unable to see the future or plan for the days ahead.

All signs point to intensified fighting and protracted conflict in the Donbas region that risks additional sieges and human misery. Adding to the risks, as Russia exhausts its stocks of high-precision weaponry, it may pursue a more no-holds-barred strategy, increasing the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. As the battle for Sievierodonetsk intensifies, we anticipate a heavy humanitarian and civilian toll given the urban environment. With road and bridge access severely degraded, [12,000 civilians](#) remain in the city, where water and electricity have been cut off.

In the face of staggering need, our ability to deliver aid and services is limited. Part of the solution is to work closely with Ukrainian local partners (local NGOs and community-based organizations) who have been stretched to capacity but are the unsung heroes in the response, since the first days of the war. But all humanitarian actors lack unimpeded, continuous access to affected and encircled areas, which is hampering the delivery of medicine, cash grants, and other lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable families. Safe access to civilians, including in Russian-controlled areas, remains an urgent priority, especially as lines of control shift.

In contrast, areas in western and central Ukraine are relatively calm, though needs and uncertainty remain. As Russian troops withdrew from areas around Kyiv and Kharkiv, refugees and IDPs began to return home. In recent weeks, the IRC has seen more Ukrainians returnees than refugees and [UNHCR](#) logged 1.9 million return border crossings to Ukraine as of 20 May, although many may have been temporary or pendular in nature. Cities and markets away from the front lines are largely functioning, though supply chain disruption can make stocks unpredictable, and a country-wide fuel shortage is causing long queues and high prices at petrol stations.

Despite the significant resources and funding that have been channeled into this response, dangerous gaps remain for communities grappling with family loss, multiple displacements, and lack of control over their lives. Women and girls, especially when on the move or in displacement shelters, are at risk of increased gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse and human trafficking. Children are experiencing significant psychological distress having been exposed to intense violence and loss, compounded by the lack of access to education and other safe spaces. The [Ukrainian Ministry of Education](#) reports over 1,700 education facilities have been damaged and 180 destroyed - with some 3.6 million children affected. Despite a clear need for specialized protection services, almost all efforts and capacity has been redirected to the provision of emergency assistance.

Even well-resourced sector responses are undermined by bureaucratic obstacles. According to [WFP](#), over a third of all households report having no income. Humanitarian organizations, including the IRC, quickly organized a large-scale multi-purpose cash program to enable families could but food and other basic items. But cash accessibility has remained a significant challenge. In the absence of local bank accounts, many NGOs struggle to pay local vendors (landlords, suppliers, etc.). Cash liquidity challenges have been compounded by the National Bank of Ukraine's decision to put a hold on NGOs using MoneyGram to deliver cash, a key distribution modality.

Responding to needs today and preparing for the long-term impacts of this war will require fast, flexible, and long-term funding especially to NGOs and local actors with insights and understanding of evolving needs, investments in bilateral diplomacy to remove bureaucratic and banking challenges, and multilateral diplomacy to protect and expand access to populations most in need.

Refugee response in Poland and beyond

In just 100 days, a staggering [6.8 million](#) people have fled Ukraine. Amidst the chaos of the early days of this war, we saw a heartening European response. Poland and other frontline countries kept their borders open, even as Ukrainian arrivals surged quickly into the millions. Over half ([3.7 million](#)) of all refugees fled to Poland. Despite the practical and political pressures of hosting such a massive refugee population, Poland continues to roll out refugee-friendly policies including access to childcare, free Polish language courses, and streamlined employment rules for displaced Ukrainians.

Despite this spirit of welcome, strains are emerging especially in larger Polish cities. Affordable housing was in short supply prior to the war. Now, Warsaw's and Krakow's populations have surged by 15% and 12% respectively. As the summer tourist season begins, apartment rentals and tourist lodgings that have been generously made available for free are likely to reduce in number as hosts need to earn rental income. Gracious Polish families that have welcomed Ukrainians into their homes, under the assumption it would be days or weeks, are now looking at protracted stays even as the Polish government [ended the subsidy](#) for refugee hosts. The options are limited for the Polish authorities: 1) refugees need to move to more rural areas and smaller cities and incentives are being offered up to those willing to do so; and 2) more Ukrainians need to be resettled/relocated out of Poland.

While European countries are in a far better position to provide medium- or long-term support to refugees than most other major host countries, the burdens are spread unevenly and are falling disproportionately on frontline states with fewer resources to spare. Yet, the institutional donors, including the US, are not funding humanitarian NGOs in Poland but rather are channeling [all funding](#) via multilaterals such as UN agencies. This structure concentrates resources in a very small number of actors with bureaucracies that are often slower, less dynamic, and less rooted in deep understanding of the refugee and host community needs. Moreover, the UN regional refugee response plan, that funds the refugee response in Poland and other frontline states, is woefully under resourced ([by 80%](#)). While volunteer-led and massive local government and private sector resources are filling some gaps for now, these efforts are all but certain to wane as the conflict, and displacement, becomes protracted. Similarly, the IRC is quite concerned the lack of sufficient and timely donor support to the response effort in Moldova. This small front-line country, which is neither an EU or NATO member, is already hosting the [highest number of refugees per capita in Europe](#). And Moldova could see a rapid surge in arrivals should violence and fighting spike in southern Ukraine, especially in Odesa.

More broadly, the European response is starting to show signs of strain. Early on, the EU has triggered for the first time Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which grants temporary protection in Europe for up to 3 years for people fleeing Ukraine, which includes access to work, health care, and education. However, EU member states have failed to implement the directive uniformly – with support and access differing from country to country. As such, less than half of Ukrainian refugees have applied for temporary protection and the bulk of the responsibility continues to fall on a few countries.

But this crisis will require looking beyond emergency aid to a longer-term response that includes a focus on integration, and zeros in on the specific needs refugee population that is overwhelmingly women and children. It is critical that the international community lay groundwork now when humanitarian obligations and politics remain largely aligned and before the bends in the refugee response become breaks. This will require a step increase in burden sharing across Europe and the US.

The Global Fallout

In just 100 days, the fallout of this crisis has gone global. Ukraine and Russia are major food suppliers to some of the world's most food insecure countries and regions. Together, the two countries produce a [quarter of the world's wheat and grain supplies](#) and their food exports account for [12 percent](#) of the world's total consumed calories. Now, Black Sea ports like Odesa, which facilitate the export of [98 percent](#) of all of Ukraine's grain, blocked. Twenty-five [million tons](#) of grain are idling in Ukrainian silos, interrupting global supplies today and threatening future supplies as 20 million tons of grain from the fall harvest will have [nowhere to go](#).

Populations in low-income, food import-dependent countries - already impacted by conflict, COVID-19, and climate change - are now enduring ripple effects of supply chain disruptions, skyrocketing food prices, and rising inflation. Price increases of agricultural commodities, such as maize, wheat, and sorghum are driving hunger in many of the places the IRC works. [47 million people](#) are projected to experience acute hunger this year on top of the record [276 million](#) in 2021.

Adding to the complexity, Russia and Belarus are two of the world's top fertilizer exporters and both are now the subject of global sanctions regimes that have widespread chilling effects on all industries, even as fertilizers are not sanctioned. With fertilizer prices already at a record high prior to the conflict, these emerging shortages pushed prices up by [20% in March alone](#). These prices, 300% higher than three years ago, are pushing fertilizers out of reach for farmers the world over and are set to lead to poor harvests in some of the world's lowest-income and food insecure regions, signaling we have yet to see the worst of the global hunger fallout.

The real-world impacts for IRC clients and programs are as devastating as they have been swift. In Somalia, which depends on Russia and Ukraine for a staggering [92%](#) of its wheat imports, the minimum expenditure basket/food basket has increased by between [40% - 100%](#). According to our clients, prices for staples like sugar, cooking oil, and grains have tripled. Perhaps the most chilling sign of the devastation to come, the price of sorghum, a replacement grain, now exceeds the prices seen during the 2011 famine that killed 250,000 people. Rising prices means that the value of cash assistance provided by humanitarian organizations like the IRC is essentially cut in half or more. Due to fuel cost increases, the cost of water trucking has doubled in the past three months – cutting in half the number of Somalis we can afford to supply with clean water. 1.4 million [children](#) are likely to suffer from acute malnutrition, but fewer Somali children have access to life-saving interventions as the cost of purchasing and transporting malnutrition treatment is spiking.

The Sahel is also experiencing its highest levels of food insecurity since 2014. [18 million](#) people are experiencing severe food insecurity and [7.7 million](#) children are malnourished. According to ECOWAS and WFP, high prices of fertilizer and seeds mean that the region is projected to experience a 20% decline in agricultural production this year compared to the 2017-2020 averages, signaling we are just at the beginning of this cycle.

The impacts span far beyond Africa – to Yemen, which depends on Ukraine for nearly half its wheat imports; to politically combustible Lebanon, which had limited grain stockpiles due to the 2020 Beirut port explosion; and to our own hemisphere, where food prices in Central America and the Caribbean are well above the five-year average. Yet with all eyes on Ukraine, donor attention and funding for these rapidly deteriorating crises are dangerously lacking. While the UN flash appeal for Ukraine is nearly [75%](#) funded

just three months into the crisis, humanitarian response plans for protracted crises across Africa, Central America, and beyond are funded at less than [19%](#) on average.

Time for Action and Accountability

The scale of the suffering and devastation inside Ukraine is unimaginable and is outpacing the humanitarian response despite the resources that are flowing in – including funds generously appropriated by this Congress. While the only solution to this crisis is an end to the war, the US and its fellow donors could catalyze a more effective emergency response by taking these practical, meaningful steps:

- 1. Diversify funding models.** The US and other donors are channeling almost all their funding through UN agencies which risks a slower, less dynamic response. The donor community, with US in the lead, should increase the volume of aid – both direct and passed-through funding from the UN – to frontline implementers in Ukraine and, importantly, in Poland and Moldova.
- 2. Preserve and expand cash-based programming.** The US government should push on the Government of Ukraine to release the National Bank of Ukraine's hold on MoneyGram and avoid interruptions on other money service providers. This would allow IRC and other humanitarians to scale up cash programming to thousands of Ukrainian families.
- 3. Invest in specialized protection services.** The specialized protection needs and risks for specific populations – women, children, the elderly, disabled people - will continue to grow. Ukrainian civil society organizations and NGO partners have the skills and insights to deliver mental health and protection programming but need funding to move beyond commodity-based aid.
- 4. Protect and expand humanitarian access:** The US and its partners should prioritize diplomatic efforts to protect and expand humanitarian access across lines of control. This should include pushing for UN efforts to strengthen existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms to support evidenced-based humanitarian diplomacy and examining independent monitoring models protect humanitarian action from political pressures and dynamics.

The refugee crisis in Europe will be protracted and we know from contexts around the world, patience wears thin, and politics become complicated. To respond to looming challenges in the refugee response and help preserve the spirit of welcome, the US should:

- 1. Coordinate donors to ensure funding needs in Poland and other neighboring countries are met.** With the UN Refugee Response Plan only 20% funded, response efforts in frontline states are being financed largely with government and private-sector funding that is likely to decrease in the months to come. Countries that have opened their borders and homes to millions of refugees must not be left to manage on their own. The US should work quickly with other donors to increase institutional donor funding, including funding direct to NGOs, before private and local government funding levels dry up.
- 2. Push for burden-sharing within the EU – both with respect to numbers hosted and harmonization of support and services offered.** Ukrainian refugees remain concentrated in a handful of mostly frontline states. This is driven in part by Ukrainians' preference to stay close to Ukraine or to family and friends, but also because levels of financial support and access to services vary widely across countries. For instance, Germany and Poland offer Ukrainians full access to the health system, while

other EU countries restrict access to emergency care. Without a move toward more equitable access to services and support, a handful of countries (often with smaller GDPs like Moldova) will be left managing the lion's share of displacement crisis – a recipe for instability and backlash.

3. **Regularize the status of Ukrainian parolees in the United States.** Congress has previously passed legislation that allowed [Cubans](#), [Southeast Asians](#), and [Iraqis](#) parolees to adjust to legal permanent residence status. Congress should offer Ukrainian parolees the same pathway to permanent status by passing a Ukrainian Adjustment Act. An Adjustment Act would be a substantive measure for Ukrainians stuck in limbo and an important symbol of solidarity with the European countries hosting far larger numbers of Ukrainians and grappling with expanding the scope of TPD and creating more meaningful long-term integration opportunities for Ukrainians.

While attention is on Ukraine and Europe, countries on the knife's edge of famine cannot be left to bear the costs of this war on their own. To address the global hunger fallout, the US should build on the foresight of the emergency supplemental and take the following donor and diplomatic steps:

1. **Quickly disperse committed funds for humanitarian crises** such as Afghanistan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. The US should build on this track record to **rally other donors to close funding gaps** of humanitarian agencies affected by rising food and fuel prices and **provide anticipatory funding** to humanitarian contexts characterized by both high levels of food insecurity and dependence on grain and other commodities from Russia and Ukraine.
2. **Ensure sanctions regimes have clear guidance, exemptions, and exceptions related to critical commodities.** While there are no sanctions on fertilizers, the US government, with Treasury in the lead, should move quickly to eliminate ambiguity and counter the inevitable chilling effects of sanctions on risk-averse commercial and financial actors. This could include comfort letters and direct outreach to shipping and insurance companies to encourage them to engage in the export of Russian and Belarussian fertilizers.
3. **Catalyze a humanitarian diplomatic coalition focused on ending the blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports to relieve the global grain shortages.** Building on Turkish efforts launched this week, it is critical diplomatic efforts center on bringing the countries most affected by the war's hunger fallout to the table to ratchet up the humanitarian pressure and minimize political distractions.

But aid without accountability is just a temporary fix at best. Besiegement of cities, targeting of civilian infrastructure, the usage of rape as a weapon of war, denial of aid access, and targeting of aid workers is not unique to Ukraine, but witnessed in Syria, Afghanistan, Mali, Yemen and beyond. Inhuman conduct of war is driving record levels of displacement and need globally.

Especially when compared to Syria, Yemen, or the DRC where impunity has reigned for years and even decades, the pursuit of accountability in Ukraine has been rapid and robust: an ICC investigation, OSCE reports, and a Russian soldier tried in Ukrainian court all within the first 100 days of the war. The international community must express the same outrage and demand the same accountability when a missile hits a busload of children in Yemen, when a bunker-busting bomb obliterates a maternity hospital in Syria, and when humanitarian access is denied in Ethiopia.

We urge the US to take advantage of the attention on Ukraine to catalyze a long overdue shift towards accountability and turn back the tide of impunity in warfare. Such an effort requires (1) reaffirming the

US' own commitments to international humanitarian law, (2) ensuring respect for such law and humanitarian impacts is a prerequisite for all security partnerships and arms transfers – including for Ukraine, and (3) pushing for (and funding) mechanisms to monitor violations of international humanitarian law in all conflict settings to hold violators to account.

I offer my sincere thanks to the Subcommittee for its commitment to Ukrainians and the millions of other around the world experiencing the fallout from the war. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide IRC's perspective on this defining humanitarian crisis and share the challenges facing my IRC colleagues and our clients. I look forward to answering your questions.