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PROBLEMS OF UKRAINIAN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

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Purpose and objectives. To raise awareness about the crisis in Ukraine and the problems of internally displaced persons (IDP) from Donbass region and encourage the society to help them in this difficult time.

Methods of research. Searching different Internet information about the problem of IDPs from Donbass, analyzing and comparing it.

The Syrian refugee crisis is undoubtedly a concern in Europe at the moment, with 681,713 asylum applications submitted and an estimated total of nine million people having fled the country since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011 – seeking a safer place to live. While these individuals deserve our attention and, of course, proper funding, we must not ignore another crisis developing in Europe at this very moment. The violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine has already created more than 1.1 million refugees and more than 1.41 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), the latter becoming an increasing area of concern for human rights activists.

Internally displaced persons do not seek asylum in different countries, but remain within the boundaries of their home state, which creates a completely new set of problems in monitoring their wellbeing. The Ukrainian IDPs are currently scattered across the country – many unregistered – and most are not living in refugee shelters. This has led to what is now termed as an “invisible” crisis.

One of the biggest catalysts of the present situation is the absence of an official combat status in Ukraine. The conflict in the East was never actually declared a war – despite the thousands of casualties and wounded – thus, no official evacuation was initiated and no official resettlement organized. The inhabitants of the Eastern regions were left to their own devices and arranged their own evacuations. This now poses countless tracking problems and impedes the assurance of proper humanitarian aid. But the lack of official status and proper registration procedures are not the only difficulties the internally displaced are facing at the moment:

Housing. There are currently only two housing options for the internally displaced: rent a place independently or live in a government-run property. While the Ukrainian government has agreed to arrange lodgings for the internally displaced, many applications for the residences are rejected and many of the actual designated properties do not receive funding from the state as promised – thus, are unable to accept residents.

Renting privately is the only other alternative, but this option is also not hassle-free. Since IDPs receive little funding from the government and may not have had adequate savings prior to the conflict, the breadth of their rental options is insufficient. Many choose to rent residences with other IDPs to save on costs. But either way, the Ukrainian government does not ensure access to liveable lodgings to the internally displaced.

Funding. The state does provide funding to the internally displaced, but it is inadequate. An able-bodied individual receives approximately C\$25 per month, an individual with disabilities receives approximately C\$55 per month, while children and pensioners receive C\$50 per month. This amount of funding is not enough to support an individual, even if they do live in a state-run shelter. According to the most recent data, 63% of the internally



displaced only have money for food, while 24% of the participants admitted that they often cannot afford to buy food at all.

Employment. There are several job centres accessible to the internally displaced, yet out of the 38,000 applying through these job centres, only 7,000 found employment. Most IDPs seek employment independently, with greater success. That being said, out of the approximately 946,000 registered IDP households, 107,900 are still seeking some sort of employment.

Discrimination. Many Ukrainian IDPs report discrimination while looking for a rental properties or searching for employment. This may partly be due to the view many Ukrainians share, that the inhabitants of the Eastern regions are to blame for the outbreak of violence in the country because they are widely believed to be pro-Russian – claims that have yet to be substantiated. IDPs are also sometimes described as unwilling to work and intent on living off government subsidy.

In a recent study, 81% of the participants had positive or neutral attitude toward IDPs, with 19% admitting to harbouring some degree of contempt for the displaced. In terms of housing, a study found that approximately 80% of landlords admitted to not trusting the internally displaced as tenants, while 57% of participating IDPs reported actual discrimination during apartment hunting.

Another vital detail of discrimination against IDPs is actually perpetuated by the Ukrainian government, because current legislature bars the displaced from participating in elections – violating their constitutional rights as citizens. This particular issue is under heavy fire from numerous human rights organisations.

According to sociological studies conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology at the request of the Agency for Refugees and the Ministry of temporarily occupied territories and internally displaced persons, two years from the start of the conflict in Ukraine relation to the overwhelming majority of IDPs remained unchanged. Almost all respondents treat them positively or neutrally.

Accessibility and medical care. There are several concerns within this category. Approximately 65% of IDPs are pensioners or individuals with disabilities, meaning they need access to medical care. As it stands, hospitals across Ukraine are often lacking medical supplies for the locals and are now even more strained to support the influx of IDP patients.

Furthermore, government-run residences or rental properties are not usually equipped for persons with physical disabilities – posing a literal accessibility problem.

These are all manageable problems, which can be solved with proper funding, government lobbying and responsible humanitarian organisations.

Crime. Kyiv residents more often than elsewhere, assess the presence of IDPs from the negative side. Specifically, 39% of Kyiv residents indicate worsening crime situation, while in other regions, this figure does not exceed 16%. On the strengthening of social tension indicates 21% of Kiev, twice more than in other regions.

Given these factors, the Kyiv government must establish a long-term policy on all key issues related to IDPs: registration, social assistance, documentation, employment, education, and integration into host communities. It should also launch an aggressive media campaign to reverse the negative image of IDPs now prevalent in Ukrainian society. One suggestion is to cover positive experiences of IDPs integrating into host communities and highlight the human side of displacement rather than political issues. Finally, as civil society gains influence, it can also help the government find durable solutions for Ukraine's growing population of IDPs.