



## Internally Displaced Women in Ukraine Face Abuse and Exploitation

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**A**rmed conflict that began in eastern Ukraine in April 2014 has resulted in over 10,000 human casualties, massive violations of human rights, grave suffering and significant civilian displacement of some 1.3 million people. The country's capacity to respond is weakened by pre-existing systemic inequalities and gaps in infrastructure and services. Among internally displaced persons (IDPs), women are experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) three times more frequently than local women who were not displaced. Since November 2015, UNFPA and national partners have developed a system of psychosocial support (PSS) services for those traumatized by displacement and for GBV survivors, delivering mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in Eastern Ukraine with PSS mobile teams.

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# HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

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## **An ongoing conflict with 1.3 million IDPs**

Humanitarian organizations estimate that at least 3.7 million people have been affected by the conflict, including 1.3 million internally displaced persons. People living along the “contact line,” those in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs), as well as IDPs are the most affected and most vulnerable populations.

## **Women IDPs at greater risk for violence, abuse and exploitation**

A study of GBV in five conflict-affected provinces of Ukraine, organized by UNFPA in 2015, revealed that internally displaced women had experienced GBV three times more frequently than local women who were not displaced. The study respondents reported instances of humiliation, intimidation, blackmail, verbal threats, physical violence, confiscation of money or property, confiscation of official documents, forced labour without pay or for a pittance, and being subjected to improper sexual comments as the most prevalent forms of abuse experienced during the conflict.

## **Mental health and psychosocial consequences of violence and conflict**

The experience of violence not only damages physical health but also often results in grave, sometimes lifelong psychological consequences. Because displacement uproots survivors from normal life and support systems, these psychological effects are much more intense among IDPs. The most prevalent disorders identified in the study included intrusive memories (flashbacks), significant changes in sleep patterns and repeated nightmares, and a perpetual feeling of fear or guilt. These problems could adversely influence resilience, potentially provoking the risk of increased domestic violence and violence outside the family.

## **The need for accessible mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services is urgent, not only for survivors of violence but for all people living in conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.**

## STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

### **Building on a history of services and support**

In November 2015, UNFPA and its national partners started to develop a system of free-of-charge, safe and confidential psychosocial support (PSS) services for GBV survivors in the government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. Interventions have included PSS mobile teams, safe spaces, health service delivery points and telephone hotlines.

The interventions, originally part of the joint United Nations humanitarian response in Ukraine, are now part of broader UNFPA support to develop and strengthen the GBV prevention and response system at national and regional levels. This work serves as a model for national-level expansion and replication. The recently adopted Law of Ukraine on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence (#2229-VIII) opens up the possibility of institutional recognition and further development for long-term protection of GBV and domestic violence victims, such as permanent PSS mobile teams.

### **PSS mobile teams reach violence survivors where they are**

Mobile health teams bring psychosocial support services to GBV survivors in need, helping them to overcome psychological distress and develop coping mechanisms. PSS services are located closest to the armed conflict zones and IDPs. Specially trained PSS mobile teams include up to three psychologists and social workers.

Provided with vehicles, the teams can reach remote and underserved areas where they deliver psychological counselling,

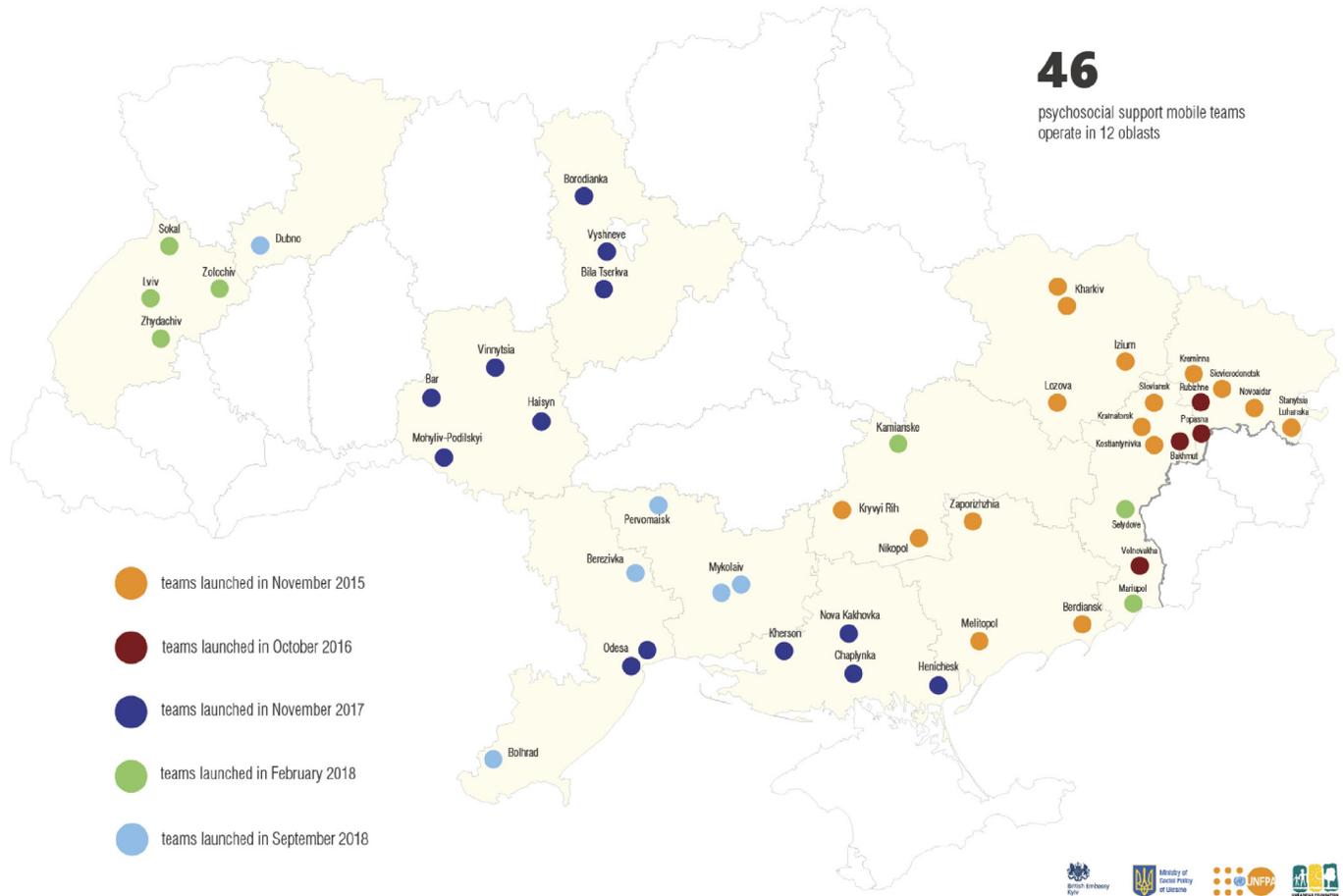
## UNFPA RESPONSE OBJECTIVES

### **To support populations in need in Ukraine, UNFPA is working to:**

- Strengthen capacity and expand coverage of service providers to comprehensively respond to GBV cases and prevent future acts of violence, using a survivor-centred approach.
- Ensure free and inclusive access for all survivors of GBV to quality essential services, including psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health care and legal aid.
- Scale up free-of-charge, safe and confidential psychosocial support to survivors of GBV while reaching the furthest behind first.

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psychosocial support mobile teams operate in 12 oblasts



psychosocial support, case management information and awareness services, advisory and referrals. PSS team members also provide services at municipal centres offering social services and conduct outreach in local communities. The teams respond to GBV against children by providing Psychological First Aid and registering cases with relevant authorities.

In addition to PSS, the programme provides physical protection, shelter facilities and medical care, including HIV and STI treatment (e.g. post-exposure prophylaxis) and legal counselling. It also offers education and awareness-raising on GBV.

An evaluation of the PSS mobile team was conducted in 2018 and the good practice was featured in a publication titled "Integrated response to end gender-based violence against vulnerable women and adolescent girls in Ukraine".

## PROGRESS AND RESULTS

- **46 PSS mobile teams are covering 12 provinces** as of 2019 — up from 21 covering 5 provinces in 2015
- **59,349 GBV cases** were responded to by the PSS mobile teams from November 2015 to August 2019. Most are women (88 per cent) and most are local, non-displaced residents (83 per cent).
- **Some 64 per cent of psychosocial support clients** had not previously reported their GBV case anywhere else but to the mobile teams, suggesting that they were the first available source of help.
- **2,000 GBV case each month** countrywide are reach by the PSS mobile teams

*"For now, I only want peace of mind – that's all. What does it take ... But one thing I can say is don't let yourself be insulted, humiliated, don't let yourself be bullied. And don't excuse. Do not believe that your offender will change himself. They never change."*

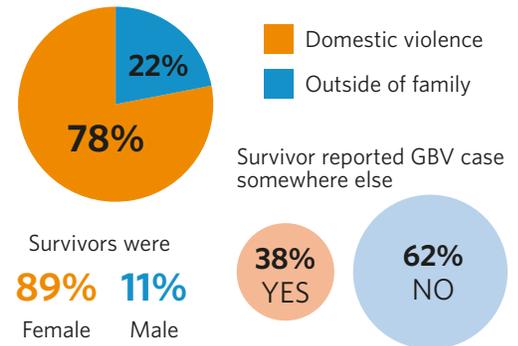
—Olga, a GBV survivor, shared with the PSS mobile team

# LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In late 2018, UNFPA conducted a comprehensive independent evaluation of PSS mobile team model of service provision to inform the next phase of the scaling-up process and the transition and transfer to national ownership. The evaluation described it as a role model for other countries in the region and beyond. By July 2019, more than 200 PSS mobile teams had been established by local authorities in regions outside those covered by the UNFPA intervention. To support new service providers, the UNFPA Country Office in Ukraine is developing a package documenting the experiences and best practices of the PSS mobile teams.

## Psychosocial support mobile teams November 2015–July 2019

Responded to **59,349** cases of GBV



*"I wanted to get away from him for a long time. But I was afraid, did not dare to do it, all in all – there was simply no place to go... What can I advise women who find themselves in this situation? If beating happened once, then it will happen again – the second time, the third... It is better not to believe the apology, but at once to go. And seek help."*

—Mary, beneficiary of psychosocial support in Ukraine

## PARTNERS AND DONORS

### Implementing and support partners

Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine  
Ministry of Health of Ukraine  
Ministry of Justice of Ukraine  
Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine  
National Police of Ukraine  
Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health  
UNICEF (PSS mobile teams in Donetsk and Luhansk regions)

Social service centres for families, children and youth in **12 regions:** Donetsk Oblast Civil-Military Administration; Lugansk Oblast Civil-Military Administration; Dnipropetrovsk Oblast State Administration (OSA); Zaporizhzhya OSA; Kharkiv OSA; Odesa OSA; Mykolaiv OSA; Kherson OSA; Lviv OSA; Kyiv OSA; Vinnytsia OSA; and Poltava OSA, **and 12 municipalities:** Sloviansk City Council; Mariupol City Council; Rubizhne City Council; Kryvyi Rih City Council; Berdiansk City Council; Kharkiv City Council; Odesa City Council; Mykolaiv City Council; Kherson City Council; Lviv City Council; Kyiv City State Administration; and Vinnytsia City Council

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