



Forum: Third General Assembly

Topic: Assessing the Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on
Civilian Populations and Access to Humanitarian Aid

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Introduction

The war between Russia and Ukraine which began in February 2022 marks a shift in international security and humanitarian law. A political and territorial conflict in its genesis, the war developed into one of the largest European humanitarian crises since the Second World War. Millions of civilians have been displaced internally or across borders in Ukraine, and food, water, healthcare, and shelter have been severely affected. Civilian infrastructure, like hospitals, power stations, and water supplies, has been attacked intentionally, often in what appears to be a violation of international humanitarian law (IHL).

This crisis has revealed the vulnerability of global humanitarian mechanisms to mass, state-backed violence. International law such as the Geneva Conventions and the 1951 Refugee Convention is put to the test as convoys are impeded, civilian corridors violated, and refugee protections pushed to the breaking point in host nations. Organizations such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the World Health Organization (WHO) have found it difficult to operate independently in disputed or occupied territory.

The conflict has exposed not only the misfortune of civilians directly under attack, but also more general challenges in holding perpetrators accountable, in providing assistance impartially, and in protecting non-combatants in modern warfare. As it continues, the crisis also raises pressing issues about the role of international law, the role of the international community, and the feasibility of collective humanitarian action in the context of conflict between great powers.

Definition of Key Terms

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):

Individuals who have been forced to flee their homes but remain within their country's borders. In Ukraine, over 5 million people are classified as IDPs, often living in inadequate shelters and dependent on aid.

Humanitarian Corridor:

A demilitarized zone or route established to allow civilians or aid to pass safely during conflict. Several proposed corridors in Ukraine were either attacked or rerouted for military advantage, violating international norms.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL):

A body of law that seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict, protecting people not participating in hostilities and restricting the means of warfare. Central to the protection of civilians in Ukraine.

Geneva Conventions:

The foundational treaties of IHL that govern the treatment of civilians, prisoners of war, and the wounded in conflict. Repeated violations in Ukraine have raised international concern over enforcement and compliance.

Refugee Convention (1951):

The UN treaty defining the rights of refugees and the legal duties of states. It remains the cornerstone of the international refugee protection regime, especially relevant as millions of Ukrainians seek asylum.

General Overview

Since the escalation of the Russia–Ukraine war in February 2022, the world has witnessed one of the most catastrophic and complex humanitarian crises of recent years. The war has resulted in unprecedented displacement, massive infrastructure destruction, and systematic contempt for international humanitarian law. Its impact is not only within the borders of Ukraine—it resonates across Europe and the international order, testing the boundaries of humanitarian institutions, states, and courts. Over 10 million individuals have been displaced from their neighborhoods, internally displaced or refugees who have crossed borders into other nations, estimates the United Nations. Entire cities have been reduced to rubble or left uninhabitable, particularly in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Mariupol, Severodonetsk, and Bakhmut.

The crisis has put pressure on an already overextended international humanitarian relief system. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been faced with unprecedented difficulties, from obstructed access routes, insecurity for humanitarian staff, and politicization of relief. Systematic and deliberate attacks have been launched on civilian infrastructure—schools, water facilities, power stations, and medical facilities—in what many deem to be potential war crimes according to international law. Not only do these attacks violate the Geneva Conventions, but they also severely undermine the resilience of communities, and long-term recovery becomes increasingly difficult to attain.

Refugee-hosting countries such as Poland, Moldova, and Germany have absorbed millions of Ukrainian refugees. While early responses were robust, it has been hard to keep such levels of support. Domestic political pressure, resource shortages, and tensions within the population have contributed to the integration process. In all cases, vulnerable groups, especially women, children, the elderly, and the disabled, have faced heightened rates of human trafficking, economic exploitation, and limited access to education or healthcare. While the EU extended its Temporary Protection Directive to Ukrainian citizens, irregular support and long-term integration strategies are increasingly raising concerns.

Humanitarian corridors, engineered to allow the safe passage of civilians and aid workers, have repeatedly collapsed due to the lack of enforcement, intentional blockage, or active targeting. Several ceasefires brokered to authorize evacuations have been violated within hours. In the absence of neutral, demilitarized monitoring bodies, faith in such plans has been lost. Humanitarian workers themselves have been assaulted and injured as they sought to provide basic supplies to those in need. Meanwhile, limited access to areas occupied and disputed has made hundreds of thousands inaccessible for humanitarian actors.

International humanitarian law (IHL), specifically the Geneva Conventions, has been invoked repeatedly by the two parties as well as the international community, but it is applied irregularly. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened investigations into war crimes, but this is a slow process, evidence collection is plagued by logistical and political hindrances, and real accountability is in the distant future. In addition, Russia's permanent seat on the UN Security Council has brought binding resolutions to a standstill, limiting the UN to acting in a cohesive manner in this conflict.

The General Assembly, the only UN organ where member states enjoy equal voting rights, has been leading the international community's response to the crisis. The GA has denounced the aggression and called for humanitarian access through a series of resolutions. Their non-binding nature limits their effective implementation. However, they play an essential role in setting international norms and influencing international public opinion.

It has brought to the forefront the demand for a global coordinated response to the delivery of humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians. It has shown the failure of present mechanisms in intensive international conflicts involving major global powers. The participants must plan in the long term, combining emergency humanitarian assistance and structural reform in international law, refugee administration, and aid delivery mechanisms.

Subtopic 1: Displacement and Refugee Management

The war-induced displacement is unprecedented in Europe in modern times. According to UNHCR, over 10 million individuals have been displaced from their homes. Over 5 million of them are registered refugees in other nations, while another 5 million are still displaced within Ukraine. The hosting nations, such as Poland, Germany, and Moldova, have been delivering critical assistance but in most instances without adequate international support.

The vulnerable groups include children, women, and older people. The refugees come with psychological trauma, without documents, and with very limited health and education access. They include some victims of trafficking or exploitation. Even though the EU activated its Temporary Protection Directive for the Ukrainian refugees, long-term integration is an issue. The disparity in how the Ukrainian refugees and other refugees from conflict regions are treated has also generated questions regarding international refugee policies.

There should be a reaction at an international level in terms of the principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention. These are fair burden-sharing, systematic resettlement programs, and an assurance against forced return (refoulement). The delegates should consider how the global refugee system can be adjusted to accommodate the fast-evolving crises.

Subtopic 2: Barriers to Humanitarian Aid Distribution

Humanitarian relief delivery in Ukraine has been significantly hindered by various factors. As of mid-2023, over 17 million people in Ukraine were in need of humanitarian assistance, according to OCHA. Ongoing military conflict, destroyed infrastructure, unpredictable checkpoints, and weaponization of access to relief have made distribution sporadic and not safe. Entire cities in some areas, especially in eastern Ukraine, have been cut off from essential commodities for weeks.

There have even been reports of aid being stolen or diverted by militant groups. Russia and Ukraine have at times agreed on “humanitarian pauses,” but these have been sporadic and ad hoc. Humanitarian convoys have been attacked, and staff from organizations like the Red Cross and World Food Programme have operated under duress. According to Human Rights Watch, between March 2022 and April 2023, at least 20 humanitarian aid convoys were attacked or blocked in contested regions.

To facilitate greater access to assistance, demilitarized humanitarian corridors should be honored and independently monitored. Organizations such as UN OCHA, ICRC, and WHO should be provided with stronger mandates, increased budgets, and access to all zones — including in Russian-held zones. Aid should also be apolitical and based on humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Subtopic 3: Protection of Civilian Infrastructure and International Justice

The repeated and large-scale bombardments of civilian infrastructure have elicited intense concerns about war crimes and accountability. WHO reports that more than 700 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed since the commencement of the war. Electricity networks, water networks, and schools have been attacked systematically, particularly with the greatest frequency during winter seasons. The Kyiv School of Economics estimates that as of late 2023, damage to Ukraine’s infrastructure exceeded \$150 billion USD, including power plants, hospitals, and schools. Such actions often violate Article 53 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.

Enforcement mechanisms for international humanitarian law remain poorly developed. Even though the International Criminal Court (ICC) has initiated investigations, the procurement of valid, admissible courtroom evidence remains a problem. According to the UN, only 30% of war crimes investigations in Ukraine have led to charges, highlighting major gaps in enforcement and evidence collection. Drones, satellite imagery, and AI-enabled monitoring equipment can assist in the evidence collection.

Protection of civilians requires preventive and punitive action: more robust documentation of war crimes, more third-party monitoring roles, and more robust enforcement of legal accountability at the international level.

Major Parties Involved

The Russian Federation:

As one of the main belligerents in the war, Russia has taken the brunt of criticism for shelling civilians, denying humanitarian relief convoys, and violating ceasefire accords. While criticized by the international community, its status as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council has allowed it to veto binding measures. Russia has also refused the jurisdiction of the ICC, thus undermining efforts at accountability.

Ukraine:

Having become the focal point of aggression directly, Ukraine has had to endure massive humanitarian pressure. It has collaborated with international organizations to enable assistance and ensure evacuation of civilians, though its own resources are limited under siege. The Ukrainian government has constantly demanded international aid and accountability measures.

Poland, Moldova, Germany:

These countries have borne the greatest burden when it comes to accepting the refugees. Poland, for instance, accepted more than 3 million Ukrainians in the early days of the war. Governments are instrumental in providing asylum, healthcare, and education, in most instances in partnership with UNHCR.

UN OCHA:

OCHA, the UN's main humanitarian coordination agency, has mobilized emergency response procedures but is limited by access and funding.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC):

ICRC is among the major impartial humanitarian assistance institutions. ICRC has focused on medical treatment, POW monitoring, and relief assistance. Operations have been interrupted in Russian-occupied territories, however.

World Health Organization (WHO):

WHO has been monitoring attacks against health facilities and has been assisting emergency medical services within Ukraine as well as refugee-hosting nations.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
2022/02/24	Russia invades Ukraine on a massive scale from multiple axes, including the north (via Belarus), east (Donbas region), and the south (Crimea), starting open war and mass-scale humanitarian displacement.
2022/03/04	Russia and Ukraine agree to create temporary humanitarian corridors to permit evacuations of civilians, especially from Mariupol, but the cease-fire is broken within hours, leaving thousands stranded under fire.
2022/04/07	The United Nations General Assembly passes a resolution to suspend Russia temporarily from the UN Human Rights Council due to reports of gross and systematic human rights violations and international humanitarian law in Ukraine.
2022/11	Russia ramps up missile attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, targeting power grids and heating plants, and cutting power and heat to millions of civilians as winter approaches.
2023/01	The World Health Organization has recorded over 700 confirmed attacks on health facilities in Ukraine, referring to it as the largest attack on health care infrastructure in human history.
2023/06	Aid convoys attempting to reach civilians in the Donetsk region are attacked, and there is a new international call for neutral, demilitarized humanitarian corridors to be opened.
2024/02	The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has extended its Ukraine humanitarian response plan, requesting \$3.9 billion in financing in 2024 to meet increasing civilian needs.

Attempts to Solve the Issue

Resolution on Humanitarian Consequences of the Aggression Against Ukraine, 2022/03/24 (A/RES/ES-11/2)

This UNGA resolution condemned attacks on civilians, reaffirmed Ukraine's sovereignty, and demanded humanitarian access. It passed with broad support (140 in favor), but has not translated into enforceable mechanisms.

ICRC Field Operations and Reporting (2022–2024)

The ICRC deployed emergency health teams, monitored POWs, and attempted to mediate local ceasefires. Its effectiveness was mixed due to blocked access in occupied areas and risk to staff.

EU Temporary Protection Directive Activation

Activated in March 2022, the Directive granted immediate protection to Ukrainian refugees across EU member states. It was widely considered effective in short-term relief but lacks long-term solutions or global scope.

Possible Solutions

1. In order for neighboring states to help share the burden with Ukraine, a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Refugee Responsibility-Sharing Framework should be established. The relocation and protection regime would allow for sharing responsibility with receiving states in proportion to economic means, population, and infrastructure capacity. It would provide proportionate quotas for direct redistribution of refugees and include financial compensation by wealthier states for the states assisting more individuals. Such funds would be directed to housing, health, and education, among other essential services. In addition, UNHCR-led deployment teams would assess preparedness in the host countries and oversee the safe and dignified resettlement of the refugees, prioritizing the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied children, the elderly, and disabled. By improving fairness and

sustainability, the system would relieve pressure on frontline states while strengthening long-term integration of displaced Ukrainians.

2. To guarantee safe and unobstructed humanitarian relief access, a UN General Assembly mandated Multilateral Humanitarian Corridor Oversight Mission (HCOM) should be sent. The mission would include unarmed monitors from neutral UN member states, ICRC representatives, and technical experts with satellite and drone monitoring capability. It would track compliance with humanitarian ceasefires, document disruption, and physically escort aid convoys into areas of greater risk. The mission would also implement a blockchain-based tracking system to track the movement of aid supplies from dispatch to distribution, reducing risk of diversion or theft. The mission would provide monthly oversight reports to the General Assembly to maintain transparency and international pressure. The initiative would depoliticize humanitarian action, protect aid workers, and rebuild trust between affected communities and aid agencies.
3. The establishment of an independent Civilian Infrastructure Protection Task Force (CIPTF) is needed to track, record, and discourage deliberate attacks on critical civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. The task force would work in partnership with UNOSAT, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and forensic investigations NGOs to monitor attack patterns and accumulate legally admissible proof for prosecution. Satellite imagery, artificial intelligence-driven data analysis, and field investigations would be utilized to monitor attacks on hospitals, power installations, and water facilities and deliver instant warnings to responders in the field. Post-conflict reconstruction plans to create more resilient infrastructure that withstands future conflict-related disruption would also be guided by the task force. Legal liaison units would facilitate the forwarding of evidence to the ICC or national courts in parallel, reinforcing accountability processes. The response would address immediate humanitarian risk along with longer-term justice for affected civilians.

Guiding Questions

1. How can humanitarian access be guaranteed during active hostilities?
2. What obligations do states have under the Geneva Conventions regarding civilian protection?
3. How can host countries better support the social and economic integration of refugees?
4. What role can technology play in documenting war crimes and securing aid routes?
5. How should the international community respond when UNSC action is blocked by a veto?
6. What reforms could enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid institutions?
7. How can neutral corridors be verified in real time?
8. What mechanisms exist to prosecute violations of IHL?
9. How can vulnerable populations (children, elderly, disabled) receive targeted protection?
10. What are the ethical limits of humanitarian intervention in sovereign conflict zones?
11. How should Ukraine's reconstruction be integrated with civilian protection reforms?
12. Can humanitarian neutrality be preserved when aid is politicized?
13. What global lessons can be learned from the Ukraine response for future conflicts?
14. What is the role of the General Assembly in conflicts where the Security Council is paralyzed?

15. How can misinformation impact humanitarian access and civilian safety?

Appendix

- <https://research.un.org/en/docs/resolutions>
- <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/resolutions-0>
- <https://reliefweb.int/>
- <https://www.unocha.org/>
- <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ukraine-crisis>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en>
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/ukraine-emergency>
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