



UKRAINIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY POSITION PAPER ON LOCALISATION

This position paper expands on the Ukrainian Red Cross' vision for localisation as described in its 2023-2025 One Plan. It sets out the Ukrainian Red Cross' objectives for localisation of aid in Ukraine's expanding humanitarian landscape, as well as within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement).

The paper looks at the URCS' unique position amongst local humanitarian organisations as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and considers its specific role as a National Society during an international armed conflict. It details how, as the country's largest and oldest humanitarian organisation, the URCS has developed its experience working in conflict settings since 2014 and has gone through its own capacity building and organisational development process. Both qualities can be of value to the hundreds of newly emerging local organisations today. Ukraine has been a key context for the Movement to test its vision for localisation and complementarity, including by piloting the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) and implementing the Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville Agreement 2.0).

Therefore, the URCS is developing its vision for localisation with key focus areas that include:

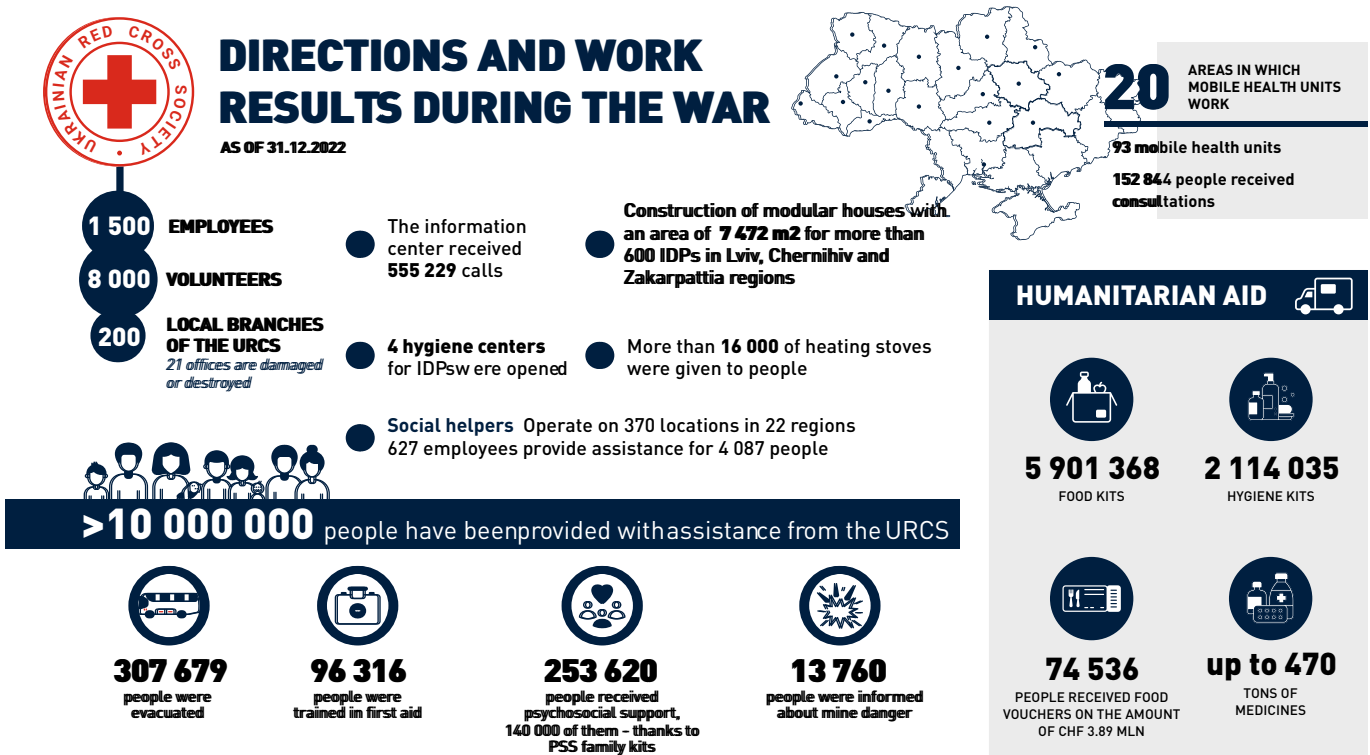
- **Improving the Movements' complementarity:** URCS sees the need and opportunity to strengthen its central role as Ukraine's National Society and therefore the Movement as a whole. The URCS sees the potential for more work with the IFRC, ICRC and PNS¹ to continue improving partnership practices and resource allocation. At the same time, the URCS recognises the comparative advantages of different Movement actors based on the specific roles and competencies of each component according to the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols, and under the Statutes of the Movement, noting that both local and international components of the Movement can make unique and essential contributions in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence.
- **Coordination:** In addition to the Movement partners, the URCS is developing strategic partnerships with local NGOs, INGOs and UN actors, to further its role in improving humanitarian coordination; including through localised co-leadership of UN clusters and recovery coordination platforms; using both its auxiliary role to Ukraine's public authorities in the humanitarian field and its network of branches to enable the involvement of local populations and relevant authorities.
- **Locally led capacity building:** URCS has worked for decades at the national, regional, and local levels through a strong network of volunteers and staff throughout Ukraine. Based on this track record in decentralizing its response, the URCS now plans to work with key actors such as the NGO Forum on how to engage with local humanitarian actors and provide its own expertise to more systematically support capacity building, organisational development, and the transition from emergency aid to the provision of sustainable, accountable, and quality services.

¹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Participating National Societies (PNS)

LOCALISATION AND THE NATIONAL SOCIETY'S AUXILIARY ROLE

Since February 2022, Ukraine has been repeatedly put forward as 'the next tipping point for humanitarian aid reform'², and portrayed as an 'opportunity for the Grand Bargain signatories to translate their commitments to local leadership of crisis response into practice'³. However, as is often the case in major crises that attract unprecedented amounts of donor funding, the incredible surge of new, community-based humanitarian actors of different capacities has been accompanied by reduced local leadership and funding. The 2023 National Conference on Localisation and its Joint Statement on Locally-Led Humanitarian Action⁴ were a reminder that progress has remained slow and limited, and that Ukraine risks adding to a growing list of missed opportunities in efforts to localise aid.

Ukraine Red Cross Society (URCS) is the largest voluntary humanitarian organisation in Ukraine. With its network of over 200 local branches and 8,000 volunteers it has an unmatched coverage in the areas controlled by the Ukrainian government. Since the beginning of the conflict, the URCS has worked in partnership with ICRC, IFRC, and PNS to directly assist more than 10 million people, support the safe evacuation of over 300 thousand, and deliver 8 million food and hygiene kits.



A unique feature of the URCS as a local humanitarian actor is its auxiliary role to Ukraine's public authorities in the humanitarian field, which allows it to work closely with ministries, central and local administrations, and other state services to access affected populations, while maintaining neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Historically, this auxiliary relationship has been especially strong in areas such as disaster management and civil protection, where the URCS strong relationship with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU) now allows it to take a leading role in emergency response and healthcare provision,

2 <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/25/07/2022/Ukraine-aid-reform-local-donors-neutrality>

3 Various (2022) Ukraine – An opportunity for the Grand Bargain signatories to translate their commitments to local leadership of crisis response into practice. 37 signatories in June 2022. bit.ly/3pPL350

4 <https://ukraine.peopleinneed.net/en/press-release-national-conference-on-empowering-local-civil-society-ahead-of-the-anniversary-of-the-war-in-ukraine10066-gp>

for example with a longstanding home visit and care programme that enables the URCS to reach vulnerable households. This auxiliary role, combined with a network of branches that reach throughout the country in government-controlled areas, also means that the URCS is a key partner for recovery and reconstruction efforts. Therefore, strengthening and better communicating about its auxiliary role is a priority for the URCS to reinforce its humanitarian leadership in the current armed conflict, shift its reputation, and increase resources through public funding.

As a National Society, the URCS has also been meeting a unique role in providing humanitarian aid for people and communities affected by the international armed conflict (IAC)⁵ between Russia and Ukraine in the areas controlled by the Ukrainian government. URCS has extensive experience working in a conflict setting which it has built up since 2014, and has developed a rare understanding of how it positions itself vis-a-vis the authorities to ensure it maintains its independence. Therefore, since February 2022, the URCS has been fulfilling its mandate by delivering humanitarian support and working tirelessly to undertake certain activities during the international armed conflict, in line with its mandate, IHL and Movement resolutions. This has included, but has not been limited to, undertaking civil defence activities such as rescue services and establishing shelters, restoring family links, providing civilian healthcare services, and evacuating the sick and wounded from combat zones.

A NATIONAL SOCIETY'S ANALYSIS OF LOCALISATION

As a major local humanitarian organisation working historically both in conflict and non-conflict affected areas, the URCS is uniquely placed to comment on the evolution of localisation efforts. Since 2014, the country has seen a growing localisation of aid, building on a rich civil society repurposing some its activities toward humanitarian work. To an extent, the point can be made that - unlike in other contexts - this localisation has not been so much shaped by policy discussions in the wake of the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, as it has been driven by the constraints faced by international humanitarian actors. Localisation in Ukraine has often been more of a modality to meet security and access constraints. As such, rather than empowering local actors, it may often involve a transfer of risk from INGOs and other international actors towards national organisations without being accompanied by the necessary investment in strengthening local capacity. This explains in part why the current response is not meeting the localisation commitments of the Grand Bargain.

Prior to February 2022, there were approximately 150 national NGOs operational in humanitarian response⁶, most of which were created because of the beginning of the conflict in 2014 and were concentrated along the contact line. In the first three months of the escalation in the armed conflict almost 1,700 newly formed groups applied for registration⁷, and thousands more operate throughout the country as volunteer led networks. This incredible surge has allowed Ukraine's civil society to respond to humanitarian needs throughout the country in rich and innovative ways. These organisations exist along a diverse spectrum, from those founded in 2014 that have experience navigating conflict settings, a basic understanding of IHL, and funding partnerships, to the more recent and organic volunteer networks. It is worth noting that, while the number of national and international NGOs involved in humanitarian programming has increased substantially, this number has dropped in the east of country⁸. URCS remains one of the few organisations with a country wide network in government-controlled areas. Unfortunately, the increase in local humanitarian actors has been accompanied by a decrease in their access to the unprecedented amounts of international humanitarian funding directed to the country. To date, less than 1% of these contributions has been transferred directly to national organisations⁹. In 2021, 40% of OCHA's Ukraine Humanitarian Fund was going directly to local NGOs. Since February 2022, this has decreased to 19%.¹⁰

5 The Role of National Societies during International Armed Conflict under IHL: an operational view, April 2022,

6 https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf

7 Ibid

8 https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf

9 <https://www.dec.org.uk/report/ukraine-humanitarian-appeal-scoping-exercise-report>

10 Ibid

FACILITATING LOCALISATION IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR AT LARGE: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

The impressive number of new local humanitarian organisations has demonstrated the wealth of community-based structures and their capacity. There is a need for these locally led actions, and room should be made for them to prosper. Organisations created since 2014 and onwards may have the experience in external partnerships, funding, and accountability which the more recent, volunteer-based ones often lack. In localising aid in Ukraine, there is a need to recognise existing capacity, to assess it more equally, and to share it more meaningfully.

URCS is well placed to provide leadership on this matter. Since 2014, it has shown resilience and determination in pursuing a significant strategic and internal re-organisation agenda while trying to ramp up its programmes and technical capacities. Amongst other things, an Independent International Audit carried out in 2016 enabled the URCS to identify priority areas for capacity building, signalled its willingness to re-organise, and played a key role in strengthening its systems, bringing on board Movement partners, attracting further funding and improving the quality of its services. **To that effect, the URCS plans to work with key actors such as the NGO Forum on how to engage with local humanitarian actors and provide its own expertise to more systematically support capacity building, organisational development, and the transition from emergency aid to the provision of sustainable, accountable, and quality services.**

Coordination is another key aspect of localising humanitarian aid in Ukraine, and one which OCHA has signalled a will to reform at a global policy level. This stems from an increasing consensus that building a more people-centred coordination model could make humanitarian efforts more efficient, effective and enhance acceptance. In Ukraine, cluster coordination officially began mid-April with initial difficulties in key oblasts given the exceptional operating environment. While on paper the country's context - with strong capacity of local authorities and NGOs - would seem ideal for piloting more localised coordination mechanisms; to date government actors and civil society organisations have not been meaningfully included on the sectors' considerable coordination efforts.

With this in mind, the URCS plans to further develop strategic partnerships with key local NGOs, INGOs and UN actors, to further its role in providing localised co-leadership of UN clusters and recovery coordination platforms; using both its auxiliary role and its network of branches to improve the involvement of local populations and relevant authorities.



© Maksym Trebuchov - Delivery of WFP food kits to the vulnerable citizens in Donetsk region by volunteers of the Emergency Response Team of the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, 2022.

FURTHERING LOCALISATION IN THE MOVEMENT: COMPLEMENTARITY AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES¹¹

In the wake of 2014, Ukraine was chosen as one of five test countries for the implementation of the Movement's Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) process, to develop the URCS potential as a local humanitarian actor and improve the complementarity and comparative advantages of Movement components, chiefly the ICRC, IFRC, and PNS based on the specific roles and competencies of each component according to the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols, and under the Statutes of the Movement. For the URCS, those advantages are first and foremost a strong understanding of the context, countrywide coverage, and proximity to communities. For an international component of the Movement, e.g. ICRC, a comparative advantage is being in a safer position to engage in sensitive Protection activities and confidential dialogue with the Parties. The SMCC process has shown how the Movement's complementarity and drawing on the Movement's comparative advantages can be critical to both improved humanitarian outcomes and the strengthening of the host National Society.

Globally within the Movement, there is a strong will not only to strengthen the central role of and support for National Societies as key humanitarian actors in their own countries, but also strengthen the capacity and authority of their community-level branches to take decisions and act swiftly in the face of crisis. In 2022, the Movement further demonstrated its commitment to localisation and approved a substantial modernization to its rules based on cooperation in international operations. The Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville Agreement 2.0) clarifies the central role of National Societies in convening Movement partners and co-creating and delivering the international activities in response to crises occurring in their countries (to the exclusion of the activities which the Statutes of the Movement and the Geneva Conventions entrust to the components individually) alongside the ICRC as co-convenor in situations of armed conflict, internal strife and their direct results, or alongside the IFRC as co-convenor in situations of disasters, when relief is needed post-conflict or in certain situations (outside of armed conflict/ internal strife) involving movement of populations.

Within this global context, the URCS sees both the need and opportunity to further strengthen its central role in Ukraine. URCS sees the potential for more work with the ICRC, IFRC and PNS to continue improving partnership practices and resource allocation. Therefore, in the spirit of some of the policies and agreements detailed above, the the URCS localisation vision for Ukraine in 2023-2025 includes:

- Increased investment of flexible, multi-year funding into long-term, local solutions led by the URCS; which include contributions towards sustainable business models and fundraising instruments (5-10% from the budgets).
- IFRC and PNS gradually reduce their operational and administrative costs, ensuring that 90% of funding can go directly to the URCS.
- Movement Partners to ensure transfer of knowledge plans to the URCS, and proper phasing out of the technical support staff and WGs established in 2023.
- Channel funding through programmes and the One Plan, rather than create multiple separate projects, to rationalise necessary reporting.
- All URCS Participating Partners (Movement and any other) support the URCS organizational development when implementing long-term projects.
- All organized forums and discussions on Ukraine and concerning the URCS are agreed on and the URCS is properly briefed and has time to consider its participation.
- Movement partners to consider and advocate for the URCS as a priority organization for funding allocations that are to be used to respond to the needs inside Ukraine.

¹¹ NB the Movement - which since its inception has been locally rooted - has repeatedly affirmed the complementarity of local, national and international actors whilst remaining committed to humanitarian responses that are as local as possible. To note, this recognition of an eco-system of local, national and international humanitarian actors that have different comparative advantages also extends beyond the Movement network, and our call for complementarity of action amongst these actors, that is as local as possible, also applies to humanitarian actors outside the International RCRC Movement. Given that this is a URCS position paper, we have decided to focus on the Movement model in this section.