



Briefing: Ukraine – 11th March 2022

Elena Kozachenko, a 38-year-old from Chernihiv, has breast cancer and is currently undergoing chemotherapy. She said: “I have cancer and I need to get medication. I had my last round of chemotherapy on 23 February. My next chemotherapy is supposed to be 16 April. I need check-ups, but they are bombing all the time... I want to leave because staying in Ukraine [now] with my diagnosis is suicide.... **I’m afraid to evacuate because I’m a living target.**”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

Amnesty International UK (AIUK) welcomes the UK government’s political efforts to protect civilians in Ukraine and its assistance to the humanitarian response. It is also encouraging to see the UK working with partners to help ensure all those involved in crimes under international law are held accountable, including through the International Criminal Court and UN (United Nations) Human Rights Council. However, whilst the government has made commitments to welcome refugees fleeing the conflict, the response does not match the scale or urgency of the crisis. It is moreover clear that the response is profoundly undermined by the general antipathy towards upholding this country’s international asylum obligations as exemplified by the Nationality and Borders Bill currently before Parliament. AIUK calls on the UK government to:

- Strengthen international efforts to protect civilians, provide humanitarian relief and help bring suspected perpetrators of crimes under international law to justice.
- Press for parties to the conflict to create & respect humanitarian corridors to safe havens, for all civilians to have access to transportation and time to leave, and for international observers to be granted access to monitor their safe passage.
- Fulfil the commitment to provide sanctuary to 200,000 Ukrainian refugees in the UK by providing safe routes to travel here, such as by a temporary visa waiver.
- Abandon measures in the Nationality and Borders Bill which will do serious damage to the UK’s asylum system.

BACKGROUND

On 24th of February, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine, with troops crossing the border and explosions in multiple cities including Kyiv. The invasion has already led to horrific consequences for human lives and human rights.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an act of aggression that is a [crime under international law](#). Russia’s invasion seeks to depose its lawfully elected government, and is having a massive impact on civilians’ lives, safety and well-being. Its acts cannot be justified on any of the grounds that Russia has offered.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK ADVOCACY OFFICE

For more information on any of the issues contained in this briefing, please contact parliament@amnesty.org.uk or call **020 7033 1557**

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Since the invasion began, Amnesty International has been documenting the escalation in violations of humanitarian and human rights law. Russia continues to deploy [indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas](#). Many civilians have already been killed after Russian forces indiscriminately attacked hospitals, schools and towns. The invading army has used ballistic missiles and [cluster bombs](#), some of which are banned, meaning their usage may qualify as war crimes. On 3rd of March, a Russian airstrike reportedly [killed 47 civilians in the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv](#). People queuing for bread in the street were among the victims. This was a merciless, indiscriminate attack on people as they went about their daily business.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered a massive human rights, humanitarian, and displacement crisis that has the makings of the worst such catastrophe in recent European history. By using force against another State without any legal justification, Russia has flagrantly violated the United Nations Charter. It is abusing its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to shield itself from accountability. Russia must stop this act of aggression against Ukraine and protect civilians. It must respect international law.

On 11th of March, The [UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) announced it had recorded 1,546 civilian casualties in the country (564 killed and 982 injured) since the beginning of Russia's armed attack on the country. Most of these casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, and air strikes. These are only the casualties OHCHR was able to cross-check, and the real toll is likely to be much higher.

HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

Civilians whose homes have been destroyed and others fearing for their lives forced to flee Russian bombardment [must be granted access to safe humanitarian corridors](#). At a bare minimum, safe evacuation routes must be provided and yet, to date, many such corridors have proven both unreliable and dangerous. Ukraine and Russia first agreed on 3rd of March to establish humanitarian corridors for civilian evacuation and humanitarian aid delivery, but implementation to date has been slow and limited. It is urgent that civilians seeking safety from the bombardments, including those whose homes have been destroyed be provided safe passage. They further should not be forced to relocate to Russian-controlled territory.

Ukrainian authorities have requested that the routes should allow civilians from heavily bombed Mariupol, Enerhodar, Sumy, Izyum and Volnovakha to escape, and for residents of several towns close to Kyiv – including Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel – to reach the capital. Testimonies that Amnesty International has collected to date from civilians in several of these locations indicate they were prevented from leaving by continuous Russian shelling.

We are calling on the parties to the conflict to agree on establishing well-planned, safe humanitarian corridors and to respect such agreements in good faith; for civilians to be provided accessible transportation as well as sufficient time to safely exit, and for international observers to be granted access to monitor their safe passage. The parties must grant impartial humanitarian relief organisations access to all civilians in need, including those who remain after evacuations. Russian forces must not employ the types of illegal sieges of civilians reminiscent of those they carried out in Grozny and Syria, subjecting them to indiscriminate bombardment, destroying infrastructure and leaving them with the choice to surrender or starve. We also object to any plan which would require civilians to relocate to areas they consider unsafe, including the occupied Crimea or Donbass regions of Ukraine, or Russia.

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REFUGEE RIGHTS

The UK Government has said that around 200,000 Ukrainian refugees will be eligible to come to the UK through visa concessions allowing the family members of British nationals and of Ukrainians settled in the UK to apply for a free family migration visa, including the spouses of British nationals, unmarried partners, children, adult offspring, parents, grandparents, and siblings. The Government must be held to account over days, weeks and possibly months ahead to ensure these commitments are made real.

According to United Nations Refugee Agency, [more than two million people from Ukraine](#) have so far fled the Russian invasion. The response by receiving countries needs to be immediate and must protect human rights. Yet, the unfolding crisis has seen the UK government widely criticised for its slow and confusing response to the needs of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. **AIUK is urging the UK government to put in place fast-track refugee arrangements for those fleeing Ukraine, such as a temporary visa waiver.**

NATIONALITY AND BORDERS BILL

This crisis, alongside those in countries such as Afghanistan and Syria, has also drawn attention to deep-seated flaws in the [Nationality and Borders Bill](#) currently going through Parliament. This Bill will fundamentally undermine the UK's asylum system; including indefinitely delaying consideration of someone's claim to asylum in the UK; making refugees who seek asylum in the UK liable to prosecution, imprisonment and destitution for having done so; and delaying or denying refugees, who overcome the many obstacles in this Bill to prove their right to asylum, any certainty about their future and the opportunity to be reunited with their family. It penalises refugees entitled to asylum in the UK for having reached the country by the only means available to them and respects neither the letter nor the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention. **AIUK urges Parliamentarians to press the government to immediately remove measures in the Nationality and Borders Bill which will do serious damage to the UK's asylum system.**

CRACKDOWN IN RUSSIA

The Russian authorities have unleashed an unprecedented nationwide crackdown against independent journalism and anti-war protests following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some [13,800 people in Russia have been arbitrarily arrested](#) for holding peaceful anti-war protests according to OVD-Info, a police watchdog NGO. There are also reports of unnecessary and excessive use of force by police during and after the arrests.

By blocking the most popular critical media outlets, closing independent radio stations and forcing dozens of journalists to halt their work or leave the country, the authorities have almost completely deprived people in Russia of access to objective, unbiased and trustworthy information. Since the start of the invasion, Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor has established widescale censorship to silence dissent.

On 24th of February, Roskomnadzor ordered all media outlets to only use official, state-sanctioned information sources or face severe punishment for spreading "fake news". The words "war", "invasion" and "attack" were all banned from use when describing Russia's military actions in Ukraine. Roskomnadzor has also blocked access to Facebook and Twitter. The blocking of news sites and the threat of criminal prosecutions has led to an exodus of journalists from Russia. According to Agentstvo, an investigative journalism site now inaccessible in Russia, at least 150 journalists have fled the country since the beginning of the war.

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