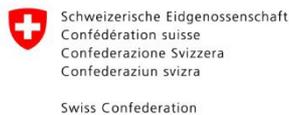


DRC



DRC Ukraine Newsletter: May 2022

Crisis brought a former colleague back to Ukraine

When many fled, Jessica F Carlson, a former DRC Area Manager decided to return to stand by and help the people and the country that became her second home after years of service. Here's her story, shared from Lviv in western Ukraine where she again works as DRC's Area Manager to support the crisis response.

Having moved around a lot in my life, my apartment in Mariupol was the longest I ever lived in one place. It was my home for nearly six years. Nearby, I walked every day in the beautiful park behind Mariupol's Drama Theatre, enjoyed margaritas at the downtown Stone Restobar, and always took our Danish Refugee Council visitors to the old Water Tower and shared that, 'all these lovely historic buildings in the centre? Built by a Danish architect!' I loved Ukraine, and Mariupol in particular. But after 14 years abroad, the last six of them in Ukraine working for DRC, I decided to move back home in September 2021.

In February I was on the Oregon coast with my parents, waking up on my mom's birthday to the news from Ukraine. Like everyone, I was in shock. I doom-scrolled on my phone, messaged friends at all hours and sat in front of the 24/7 news coverage. I cried every day, often in public at every mention that, "Weren't you just in Ukraine?" or "I hope your friends are ok". Especially after the blockade of Mariupol, I felt inconsolable. That's when I started to talk to DRC about coming back.

Coming back to Ukraine is bittersweet. I would have preferred to return under happier circumstances. I do not want to see my colleagues and friends facing such an appalling injustice. My heart aches when I think of Mariupol. On the other hand, I am immensely proud of how much our colleagues have already accomplished during the first months of this crisis. I feel privileged and overjoyed to be welcomed back to the DRC Ukraine team - I would not have come back for any other.

Today, nearly all of DRC's 240+ Ukrainian staff, are living in displacement, some for the second time after leaving Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014. We shouldn't expect or demand heroics from colleagues when they themselves have suffered terribly. And yet... they have stepped up in incredible ways. Writing proposals to mobilise aid and support for Ukraine from behind blockades, disbursing emergency cash to people in need and providing legal counselling from temporary workspaces or renovating collective centres for internally displaced people while many themselves are still unsettled. In all their moments of goodness and perseverance we can understand the quote from Ghandi, 'In the midst of darkness, light persists.'

Jessica F Carlson
DRC Area Manager, Western Ukraine

Protection



Hot meals for displaced in Dnipro

KUST was one of the first non-governmental organisations (NGO) in central Ukraine's Dnipro city to respond to the humanitarian crisis following the Russian Federation's military offensive launched on 24 February 2022. The NGO rapidly organised shelter for internally displaced people who arrived primarily from further east, fleeing hostilities there and seeking refuge and help in Dnipro, known as an infrastructure hub in the centre of the country.

The shelter soon required additional equipment and KUST, therefore, approached DRC requesting for financial assistance to respond to the immense need for emergency relief aid and safe places to stay. The assistance was soon granted to KUST, who improved and extended the living conditions in the shelter spending the funds on buying kitchen equipment to serve the newly displaced people turning up at their doorstep with tasty hot meals.

"We are now able to at least offer people a more convenient place to live for now and we hope that our efforts can help them feel a bit like back home," says Natalia, Head of the International Communications Department with KUST.

Legal Assistance



Heorhiy with his wife and 14-year-old granddaughter left their home in Ukraine's eastern Melitopol city (an area no longer controlled by the Government of Ukraine) and travelled thousands of uncertain kilometers before they reached Mukachevo city in western Ukraine. From here, they have decided to wait and see before they decide on any next steps. In the event of further escalation of the fighting and hostilities in Ukraine, Heorhiy and his family plan to seek asylum in Europe. Having left in a hurry, and being in a new city, they did not know how to apply for passports to be able to travel abroad.

That was when he found information about the free legal aid offered in Mukachevo that made him apply for help from a lawyer from the Free Secondary Legal Aid clinic – an NGO whose work is supported by DRC.

The lawyer, Iryna, explained the necessary steps to obtain a passport and helped writing the applications with their information and justification for the issuance of a passport in a city far from their home.

Heorhiy was the first to succeed and able to get the necessary documentation and, if needed, he will be able to find a safe place abroad for his family.

Such legal assistance is possible thanks to supporting of the European Union through its Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.

Capacity Building Programme



Signs of friction among Ukrainians in areas that are hosting many displaced are already there a few months into the crisis. The western regions of Ukraine are likely to experience growing tensions between permanent residents and displaced people due to increased migration flows, insufficient infrastructure and stretched resources. DRC's Capacity Building Programme includes new mobile teams of experienced mediators, who will work in locations with a high concentration of internally displaced people (IDPs) – initially in five cities of Lviv, Rivne and Zakarpattia oblasts.

The mediators will offer conflict-related counselling and support to displaced persons, volunteers, and members of host communities. They will at the same time assess the pressing humanitarian needs of IDPs, facilitate referrals for other support and services, and advocate for their rights.

Local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with IDP and host communities will also be approached and provided targeted capacity building by DRC. This will help CSOs respond to the acute needs of displaced and conflict-affected people more effectively in line with international standards.

In parallel, DRC will map and analyse previous conflict resolution and mediation practices implemented in Ukraine from 2014 to 2021 and prior to the current crisis. The study will focus on earlier civil society efforts in peacebuilding

and cooperation between civil society and state institutions in shaping the future peacebuilding agenda in Ukraine. It will also review the transformation of peacebuilding activities in Ukraine after 24 February 2022 and assess the feasibility of introducing new initiatives across the country from as early as possible to address the needs for restoring and sustaining a cohesive and resilient society recovering from consequences of conflict.

Economic Recovery Livelihoods



"A shell hit our house in Sievierodonetsk city. It happened like lightning — totally unexpected. We fled to Rivne city in western Ukraine, on an overcrowded train, with only a few clothes," says Yana.

She left Sievierodonetsk (in eastern Ukraine) with her husband, his father and five children — two of them were children of friends who could not evacuate. The couple has lost all sources of income, they tried to find a job in Rivne, so far in vain.

DRC has assisted thousands of IDPs in the same situation as Yana through a cash support programme — which is part of our emergency response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

"Without such support, I don't know how we would go through the crisis. I am immensely grateful to DRC for supporting us during this difficult time," Yana adds.

** The photo shows the building where Yana and her family lived in Sievierodonetsk. The building is now destroyed.*

Humanitarian Disarmament & Peacebuilding



In April 2022, DRC became the first organisation to establish a formal agreement with the State Emergency Services on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) work in Ukraine. For this pilot initiative — after which DRC will be able to support the onboarding of other Mine Action operators as well — the Pryluky rayon, Chernihiv Oblast, was chosen.

After the initial set of reconnaissance missions and EOD work, DRC already identified 21 Suspected Hazardous Areas littered with projectiles, rockets, mortars, anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines, guided missiles, as well as booby-traps. In May 2022, DRC also deployed its Non-Technical Survey and several clearance teams, which will likewise be followed by Explosive Ordnance Risk Education activities.

After close consultations with the local authorities, DRC's humanitarian demining will prioritise residential areas, infrastructure, agricultural land, and forests. In line with DRC's commitment and capacities to linking Mine Action with development, follow-up activities in the locality will also include Economic Recovery, Shelter, and Legal Assistance for a holistic approach to the newly emerged multifaceted crisis.