



**Open Letter to the EU Institutions on the situation in Ukraine
(Council, European Parliament, European Commission, French Presidency of EU Council)**

Dear President Michel,
Dear President Metsola,
Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear President Macron,

Brussels, 4 March 2022

We write to you with the utmost concern regarding the situation of war in Ukraine and the subsequent crisis in neighbouring countries and its impacts throughout the European Union.

As representatives of social service providers across Europe, [Social Services Europe](#) urges the European Union and its Member States to ensure respect of international humanitarian law in Ukraine, including people in the most vulnerable situations, and protect the basic human rights of all individuals in Ukraine and those on the move who have had to leave their homes and families.

We hereby wish to make you aware of the main issues of concern that we hear from our colleagues and members in Ukraine and in the bordering countries.

In normal times, social services provide care and support services to hundreds of thousands of persons with disabilities, children, older persons, homeless persons and others across Ukraine. In times of war, this essential social support – often either being interrupted or which cannot be provided or adapted – is being provided in very difficult circumstances. The former results in leaving these individuals in need of ongoing support, along with their families, on their own, at risk of abandonment. For instance, residential institutions can no longer be supported by care staff or not to the extent as previously or with the quality of care needed; and, there is grave concern that over 100,000 persons with disabilities, many of whom are children, have been left behind in institutional care settings. There are also major issues around how these particularly vulnerable people can access air-raid shelters, protective environments, safe refugee routes, etc.

In addition to its direct consequences on human lives, war impacts livelihoods, mobility, and access to much needed social, health, education, and other basic services. This impacts everyone in the territory, especially vulnerable people and those with specific support needs, such as older people, persons with disabilities, children, homeless people, and others. These people are often the invisible victims of any conflict; meaning not that they are affected less, but that their suffering is overlooked and their specific situations unaddressed. Too often, assistance to these populations come as an afterthought, at best. They deserve better than to be forgotten or ignored as we respond to the multiple crises caused by any military conflict. For most people with support needs and other persons facing particular risks, the ability to access such services is literally a matter of life or death. It is an issue of human rights; rights that must be upheld even – perhaps especially – in times of crisis.

Under international humanitarian law, humanitarian assistance must be provided to all civilians in need, and the specific risks faced by certain categories of the population are to be taken into account

in the provision of this assistance. The safety of humanitarian workers, including health care workers, to protect all civilians, irrespective of their age, nationalities, state of health, or any other similar criteria, must be guaranteed.

Some humanitarian support is already being provided to the hundreds of thousands of people in Ukraine as well as to those fleeing in search of refuge in countries bordering Ukraine. Social service providers from across Europe, who in some cases do not traditionally provide such support, have adapted their services and their priorities to respond to these emerging social needs. These organisations are also in need of EU financial support to enable them to do their job in the best possible way, including with easy, quick and unbureaucratic access. Measures are needed to ensure that social service providers working on-the-ground can continue to support the many people in need and to complement the work of new humanitarian actors. Provided that basic safeguards against abuse are properly guaranteed, they must be supported to deliver their assistance in a manner that upholds the basic principle of non-discrimination based on race, religion, gender or other similar grounds.

The increasing number of forcibly displaced persons throughout Europe will unlikely be able to return to their home country anytime soon. Therefore, there is an essential need for mid to long-term social services support, such as access to social, health care, education, housing and other services, but also access to the labour market. SSE thus welcomes that the Temporary Protection Directive has been activated in this dire situation.

We, as social service provider representatives across Europe, urge:

- The European Union and its Member States to promote and guarantee that international humanitarian law and human rights are respected and implemented in Ukraine and bordering countries, to ensure the impartial provision of humanitarian aid to all, the safety and freedom of movement of humanitarian workers, the protection of all civilians and refugees, in particular people in the most vulnerable situations.
- All decision-makers to consider the situation of the Ukrainian people, in particular those with specific support needs, relying on targeted social services who may be less able to flee. Targeted, actionable, concrete EU measures are needed to ensure that these people have safe passage, for instance, through humanitarian corridors to ensure their safe passage to more secure regions where they can then benefit from the support they need.
- The European Union and its Member States to protect and support all people, including the most vulnerable, irrespective of their age, nationality, state of health, or any other similar criteria, to safely flee and find shelter in neighbouring countries and throughout the Union. Discrimination of any form should not be tolerated.
- The European Union to offer financial support for humanitarian and medical materials and equipment, and expertise to Ukraine and organisations active in protecting vulnerable people and those with specific support needs.

Social Services Europe expresses its full and unconditional solidarity to those affected by the war in Ukraine and its bordering countries. We are determined and will continue to advocate for a rapid and peaceful resolution to the conflict and we offer our help, engagement and support to social service provision to all people, in European countries and on the move.

Yours sincerely,



Mathieu de Poorter
President of Social Services Europe