

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT-LED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN SELECTED REGIONS OF UKRAINE

January, 2023
Ukraine

KEY MESSAGES

- **Only a limited share of households in the sample reported having benefited from government-led social assistance and utility subsidies in the assessed regions.**
- **Internally displaced persons tended to be well covered by the specific monthly assistance (63% of assessed internally displaced households)** but reportedly encountered more difficulties in receiving other social assistance and utility subsidies.
- **The main difficulties reportedly faced by households in accessing social assistance** were long queues to submit paperwork (38%), the waiting time to be added to the system (29%), the challenges in getting support from a counsellor-in person, by phone, or online (24%).

OVERVIEW

To support an understanding of how households rely on government-led social assistance programmes (non-contributory) to cope with the impact of the war, REACH conducted an assessment in seven oblasts in different regions of the country.

METHODOLOGY: representative sample of 2,887 households in seven oblasts by type of settlement (urban/rural): Chernihivska, Kyivska, Vinnytska, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka and Mykolaivska. Further details are provided at the end of the factsheet.

24%

of households reported having benefited from at least one social assistance programme in the last 6 months.

13%

of households reported having received a utility subsidy in the last 6 months.

CONTEXT

One year of full-scale war in Ukraine has put the social protection system under heavy pressure. The government quickly broadened in February 2022 the scope of many social assistance programmes to accommodate the internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as to provide additional support to conflict-affected populations.

Before the war, the social protection system in Ukraine suffered from many challenges despite offering universal coverage. Before 2022, it was estimated that 73% of the population was covered by at least one social programme (including contributory

ones).¹ The main gaps were to be found in pension schemes (only 47% of the labour force covered by a pension scheme) and protection of vulnerable groups.²

A 29% decrease in the gross domestic product of Ukraine in 2022,³ coupled with decreases in social contributions paid by businesses and employees, resulted in concerns around the financial sustainability of social protection system.⁴ The latter prevented the revaluation of social assistance and utility subsidies despite a consumer inflation rate of 27% in 2022, further compounding challenges for the most vulnerable households.⁵

In the specific context of Ukraine where there is a functioning countrywide social protection system, humanitarian actors have discussed with national authorities how to channel support through existing government-led social assistance programmes.

It is therefore crucial to understand the access and potential barriers to government-led social assistance programmes faced by people in need. In particular, this assessment focused on the difficulties in obtaining assistance, the delay, and reasons for denial when applicable.

GOVERNMENT-LED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

This study focused specifically on social assistance programmes (non-contributory), which target low-income or vulnerable households whose income does not reach the minimum subsistence level- “statutory subsistence minimum” (SM), a threshold enshrined in Ukrainian law, corresponding to an absolute poverty line.⁶

In parallel, the Ministry of Social Protection regularly publishes the actual SM, aligned with the Minimum Expenditure Basket used by humanitarian actors. The actual SM is calculated on the basis of average prices for consumer goods and services and tariffs for housing and communal services. It reflects more accurately the amount of money required to meet basic needs.⁷

In January 2023, the statutory SM in Ukraine for an able adult person stood at 2,589 UAH per month compared to 5,400 UAH for the actual SM and 6,700 UAH for the minimum wage.⁸ While the actual SM rose by 16% between January 2022 and 2023, the statutory SM and minimum wage rose by only 3% (Figure 1).

Social assistance programmes aim at bringing households’ income

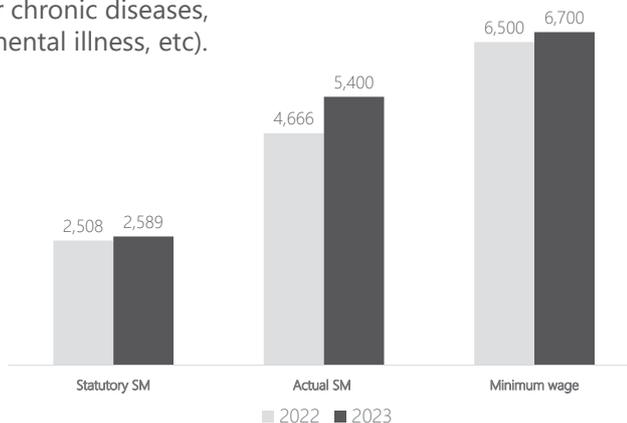
to, at least, the minimum level of subsistence. Additional benefits are provided to support households experiencing major changes in their circumstances like being displaced (IDPs housing allowance), being victim of the war, or changing households composition (maternity, giving birth, adopting a child).

The social assistance programmes under examination were regrouped in the following categories:⁹ monthly assistance for IDPs, one-time assistance for households directly affected by the war (mainly IDPs and persons injured), low-income households, children/family (several programmes, including assistance for pregnancy/childbirth, assistance for single mothers), free or subsidised medicines (for chronic diseases, oncological, mental illness, etc).

Utility subsidy (examined separately) constitutes an additional support for all households based on their income and the price of utilities.¹⁰

For households with income below the statutory SM, the subsidy can cover up to 90% of the bill from the previous year. In 2022, 1.8 million households benefited from this subsidy. Amid financial sustainability concerns, the 2022 budget already estimated that the number of households receiving this subsidy would decrease by 19%.¹¹ In August 2022, the president signed a memorandum freezing the price of utilities under martial law (gas, heat supply, hot water).¹²

Figure 1. Evolution of minimum standards of living (UAH, monthly)



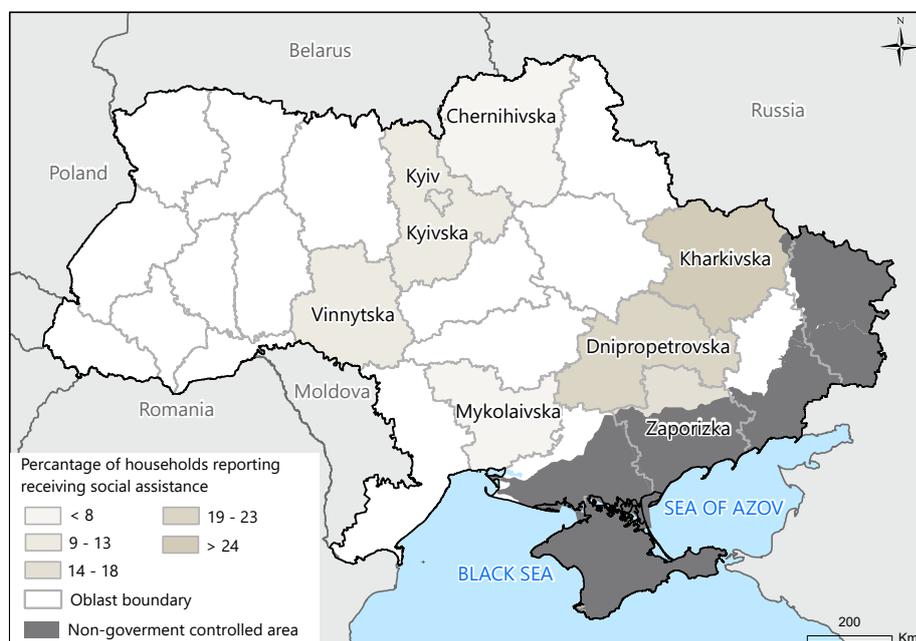
Sources: Ministry of Social Protection. Actual SM for 2023 is the Minimum Expenditure Basket fixed by the Cash Working Group in July 2022.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Only **24%** of households from areas covered in this assessment reported benefiting from a government-led social assistance programme and **13%** from utility subsidies.

There were reportedly disparities depending on the regions and type of settlement. In the assessed oblasts, the proportion of households living in Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska and Zaporizka reporting benefiting from at least one social assistance programme was higher (Map 1). In addition, households in rural areas reportedly experienced a lower coverage than in urban areas.

Map 1. Proportion of assessed households benefiting from social assistance programmes



As for utility subsidies, households living in Chernihivska, Dnipropetrovska, and Vinnytska, were more numerous to report benefiting from the utility subsidies (Map 2). **Similarly than for social assistance programmes, urban households were more likely to report benefiting from the utility subsidies than rural ones.**

This gap can be explained in part by the physical barriers for rural households to access the social protection offices. Other avenues for explanation are the limited resources of hromadas (administrative level of local authorities in charge of social assistance) in more rural areas combined with the direct effect of war for oblasts in the North and Eastern regions.

Of those who reported receiving assistance, the main programmes were: monthly assistance for IDPs (39%), one-time cash assistance for population directly affected by the war (33%), free or subsidised medicines (15%), children/families (14%).

The main difficulties reportedly encountered in receiving social assistances were: long queues when submitting paperwork (38%), long waiting time to be added to the system/ get assistance (29%), No one to consult in person/phone/online (24%) (Figure 2). Those difficulties are common for the different assistance programmes. However, more difficulties are reported by households regarding the IDPs housing allowance.

If denied social assistance, households reportedly were not given a reason for the rejection (40%), were told that they were not eligible for assistance (29%), or the wait was so long that they did not ask for an answer after submitting the paperwork (9%).

For households who reported receiving assistance or a utility subsidy, it was overall straightforward, 68% of respondents declared finding it "not difficult" and 17% "little difficult" for social assistance programmes and respectively 70% and 18% for utility subsidies). Although monthly assistance for IDPs and assistance for low-income families were more commonly reported as difficult to obtain (only respectively 61% and 57% reported no difficulty).

Once accepted, assistance is reportedly mostly received after two months, especially for the monthly allowance for IDPs and the one-time cash assistance. In contrast, almost a third of households reported benefiting from the utility subsidies up to 20 days after application and one-third after 1-2 months (Figure 3).

Map 2. Proportion of assessed households benefiting from utility subsidies

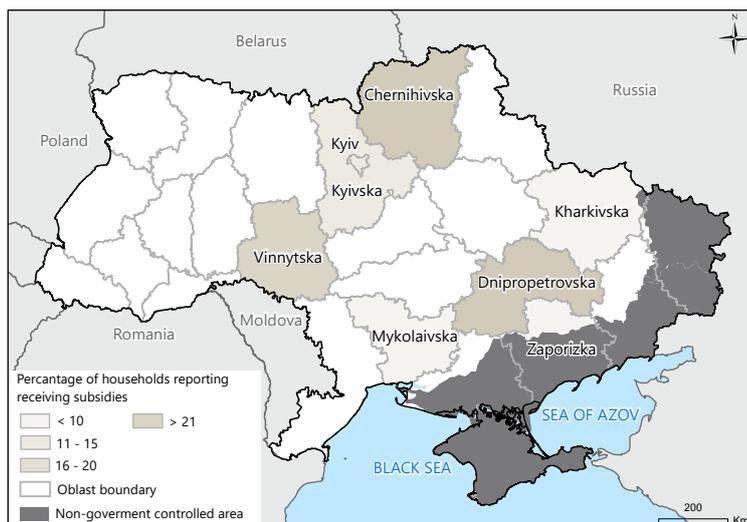


Figure 2. Reported challenges to receiving social assistance (% respondents)

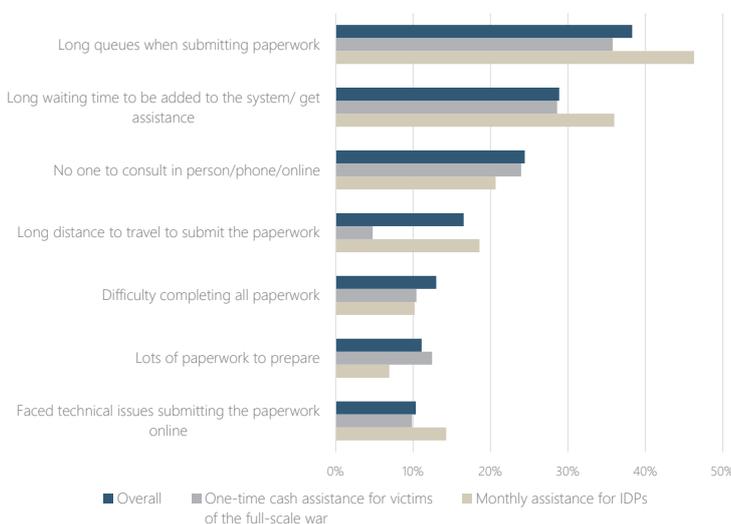


Figure 3. Reported duration for obtaining assistance via social protection, by type of programme



Note: the weighted frequencies are displayed in each bubble

ACCESS TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE BY DISPLACED HOUSEHOLDS

Internally displaced households represented only 8% in the sample (against 12% nationally); and returnees accounted for 15% households assessed (against 13% nationally).¹³ This is due in part to the geographical scope of the study, which include Northern and Southern oblasts, hosting less IDPs and experiencing more returns than the rest of the country. The largest share of IDPs in the sample are found in Zaporizhka and Kharkivska oblasts.

There are two main government-led social assistance programmes for IDPs. All registered displaced persons are eligible to a monthly allowance, amounting to 2,000 to 3,000 UAH depending on the size of the household, dedicated to support the cost of rent during displacement. IDPs can also benefit from the one-time assistance of 6,600 UAH

dedicated to households directly affected by the war. Other social assistance programmes are based on vulnerabilities of the households.

A higher proportion of internally displaced households reported receiving support from social assistance programmes (75%) compared to returnee (34%) and non-displaced (16%) households.

Among displaced households assessed, 63% received a monthly allowance (Figure 3). In contrast, only 7% of displaced and 8% of returnees households reported receiving utility subsidies (compared to 15% of non-displaced households assessed).

This finding is coherent with a recent survey of displaced persons which showed that social protection programmes or benefits from the government was one of the top

sources of income for 77% of the respondents.¹⁴

Displaced persons and returnees in the sample were more likely to express difficulties obtaining social assistance benefits from these programmes than non-displaced persons (Figure 4). The challenges identified were the long waiting time to get the application queues when submitting paperwork (47%) and receive the assistance (27%), the absence of counselling (20%) and the distance to the social protection office (13%).

Non-displaced persons were less likely to report having been denied assistance (8%) compared to IDPs (14%) and returnees (13%). When denied, most of the households in the sample did not receive any reasons or were told they were not eligible.

Figure 3. Social assistance received by assessed households, by displacement status

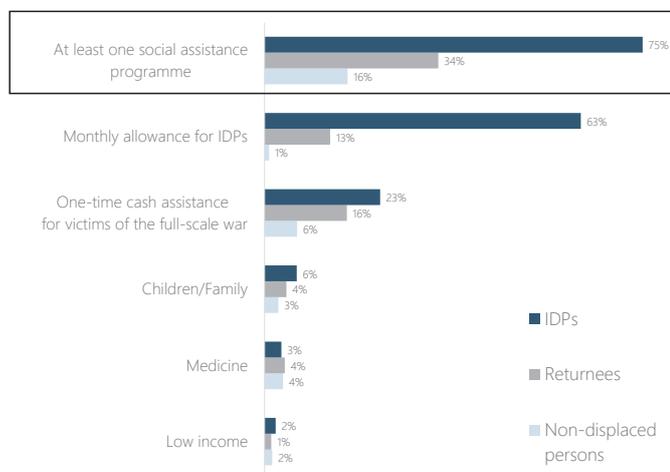
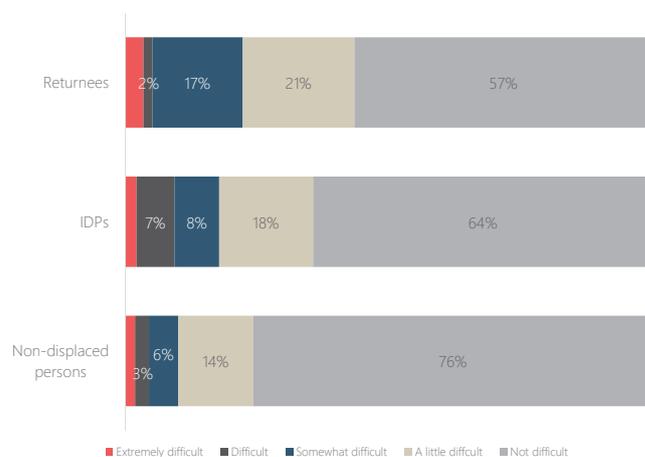


Figure 4. Reported level of difficulty accessing social assistance programmes, by displacement status



ENDNOTES

¹ Some vulnerable groups like children, mothers with newborns or persons with severe disabilities were 100% covered. See [World Social Protection Data Dashboards](#)

² *Ibid*

³ [World Bank \(2023\). Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. March 2023.](#)

⁴ [OECD. Social policies for an inclusive recovery in Ukraine. July 2022.](#)

⁵ [Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 11 January 2023](#)

⁶ Articles 7 and 8 of the Law of Ukraine № 2710-IX as of 03.11.2022 "On the State budget of Ukraine for 2023."

⁷ [The actual SM in 2015-2022](#)

⁸ [Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, 13 September 2022.](#)

⁹ <https://ukc.gov.ua/folder/sotsialnyj-zahyst-naselennya/>

¹⁰ [Byrnes, T. \(2022\) ' Overview of the Ukrainian Government's Housing Utility and Subsidy Programme and the Guaranteed Minimum Income Programme', Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources Facility \(STAAR\). DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom.](#)

¹¹ [БЮДЖЕТНИЙ ЗАПИТ НА 2023-2025 РОКИ індивідуальний, Форма 2023-2 \[Budget planning 2023 - 2025\]](#)

¹² <https://visitukraine.today/blog/754/in-ukraine-prices-for-utility-bills-were-frozen-how-much-will-you-have-to-pay>

¹³ IOM estimated that there were 5.4 million internally displaced persons and 5.6 millions returnees across Ukraine at the end of January, stable since August. IOM (2023), [Ukraine Internal Displacement Report - January 2023](#). With a total population of 43.6 million persons before the full-scale war, the percentage of displaced persons is around 12%.

¹⁴ [UNHCR \(2023\). Lives On Hold: Intentions And Perspectives Of Internally Displaced Persons In Ukraine, February 2023.](#)

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Sampling & data collection

During December 2022 and January 2023, a total of 2,887 household-level surveys were conducted throughout seven oblasts. Five oblasts were assessed in full: Chernihivska, Kyivska (including Kyiv city), Vinnytska, Kharkivska, and Dnipropetrovska. Two additional oblasts were only partly assessed (Zaporizka and Mykolaivska) due to the inaccessibility of the remainder of the oblast for reasons related to security and road conditions.

Household-level data is representative at the oblast level, as well as the two strata (urban/rural) within each oblast, with a 95% level of confidence and a 7% margin of error. IDPs, returnees, and non-displaced

households all had an equal chance of selection in the sampling process, but no representative distinction is possible as such households cannot be identified uniformly across oblasts.

In Chernihivska, Dnipropetrovska, Kyivska, Mykolaivska, and Vinnytska, two-staged stratified random geo-sampling was used. Household-level data was collected in these oblasts using face-to-face interviews in which enumerators travelled to the selected houses and performed interviews in person. A total of 2,064 interviews were collected using this method.

In Kharkivska and Zaporizka, a method of random phone dialing was used in line with the two-stage stratification method used for household interviews. A total of 823 interviews were collected using this

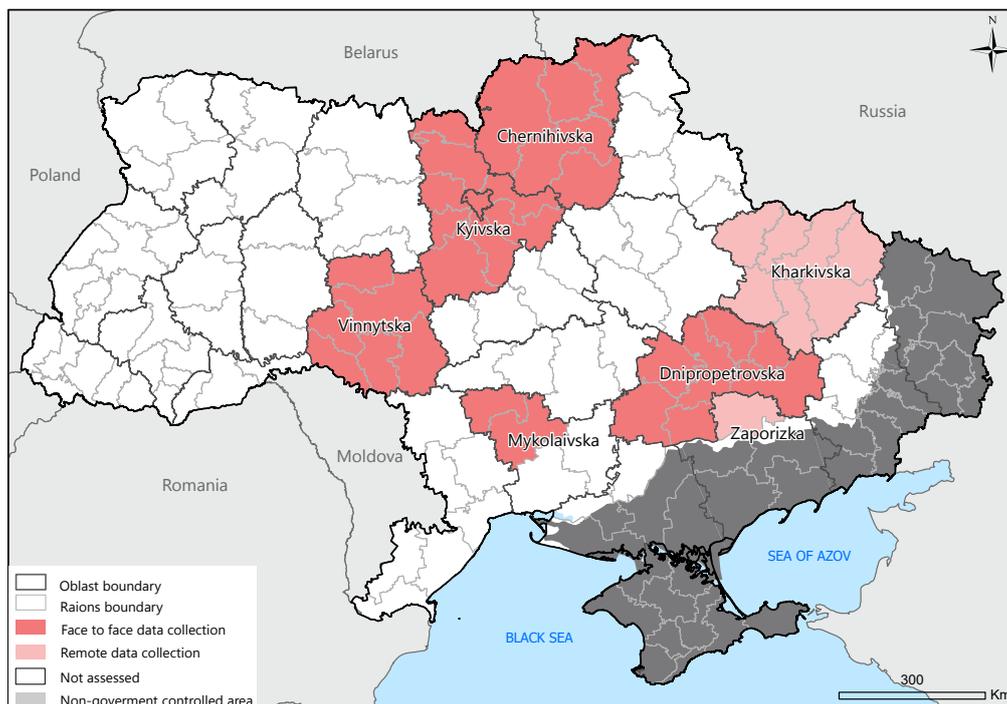
method.

Social assistance programmes

In this study a difference is made between social assistance programmes and utility subsidy, on the grounds that eligibility criteria differ for utility subsidies and have a regional component, compared to other types of assistance programmes.

The eligibility criteria of social assistance programmes depend on the minimum subsistence level (statutory subsistence minimum) corresponding to an absolute poverty line. This level is voted each year in the budget law and depends on households vulnerabilities.

ASSESSMENT COVERAGE



ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).