

IN SUPPORT OF THE CIVILIANS AFFECTED BY THE CURRENT CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

We, the rural civil sector movements in Europe, representing more than 40 countries and half of the European population living in rural areas, have been deeply shocked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and offer our solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

Cease fire and follow human rights laws

In order to spare civilians, we call on all involved to enhance their efforts towards a civilized solution of the conflict and cease fire.

We support the statement of the Red Cross, calling urgently on parties to the conflict not to forget their obligations under international humanitarian law. They must ensure the protection of the civilian population and those no longer taking part in the fighting, such as detainees or the wounded and sick. International humanitarian law is clear: all parties to the conflict have a legal obligation to ensure that military operations are planned and conducted in a way as to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects.

As the Red Cross, we ask those involved in that fighting to **take into account** that:

- Parties to the conflict in Ukraine must adhere to international humanitarian law, including the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and its First Additional Protocol from 1977, as well as ensure the protection of the civilian population and detainees. They must refrain from attacks that violate the rules of the conduct of hostilities or prohibitions on means and methods of warfare. The use of weapons with wide area effects should be avoided in populated areas.
- Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects. Essential infrastructure must be spared, including water, gas and electrical systems that, for instance, provide civilian homes, schools and medical facilities with vital water and electricity supplies. Attacks carried out with new technologies and cyber means must also respect international humanitarian law.
- Space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action must be protected so that aid actors like the Ukrainian Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the wider Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can maintain access to civilians.

We call for all states to do everything in their power and influence to avoid escalating a conflict whose cost and consequences for civilian populations outpaces the capacity to protect and assist them.

Support for Ukrainian civilians

We act in support of Ukrainian civilians and their right to democracy.

Many of our member organisations are already active in supporting, welcoming and showing their solidarity with Ukrainian refugees and we will continue to assist our members to make this possible and visible. Our network is vast, covering half of Europe's rural populations and we will continue communicating possibilities within this network.

We call on our governments to do everything in order to welcome, receive, accommodate and integrate the refugees from Ukraine in our countries. We are willing to open the doors of our homes for the refugees, as well as offer our grassroots level voluntary work input in the integration work, both in rural and urban communities.

We will continue building stronger bottom-up development structures, sharing good local development practices between our countries and increasing the level of democracy in our European Rural Parliament (ERP) civil society networks, in close cooperation with the European institutions and national governments. Our LEADER bottom-up development approach, bringing together all grassroots population groups united towards common goals and peace is an expression of democracy at the local level.

In this conflict, our thoughts go first and foremost to the Ukrainian people and children and we will do our utmost to ease the situation for them.

Brussels, 28th of February, 2022

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