

Florence Bauer has served as UNICEF Country Representative in Brazil, Argentina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, making significant contributions to advancing children's and women's rights. Before joining the UN, she worked for five years at Procter & Gamble and spent two years in the non-governmental sector.

Currently, Ms Bauer serves as the Regional Director for UNFPA in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Throughout her career, she has been a passionate advocate for prioritising children's and women's rights on political agendas and championing innovative strategies to reduce inequalities.

Question 1

How has the Russian-Ukrainian war affected the overall safety, economic stability, and access to essential services for civilians in Ukraine? What particular challenges have emerged for women and children during this conflict?

The war continues to inflict immense suffering on the Ukrainian people. It has taken thousands of lives, caused massive destruction, and displaced millions. An entire generation of children has been traumatized, families and communities have been torn apart, and the economy has been devastated. The war has also depleted Ukraine's human capital and worsened Ukraine's demographic challenges. Millions of people have left the country, the fertility rate has collapsed and is now below 1 child per woman and the population is ageing rapidly and has decreased by 10 million since 2014.

The serious humanitarian crisis in the country particularly affects the most vulnerable people, and this includes women and children. Countless children have been scarred by the nightmare of war, and hundreds of thousands are unable to attend school in person. Women often see their access to essential services disrupted, including vital health services for pregnant women and new mothers. And women are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. The figures are alarming: an estimated 2.5 million people—primarily women and girls—need support for gender-based violence. At the same time, it is important to highlight the resilience, strength and bravery women in Ukraine have demonstrated in the face of the ongoing war. They have taken on new roles: in their families as heads of household and caregivers, in the economy in traditionally male-dominated sectors and volunteer work, and in their communities as leaders and providers of humanitarian aid. They play a fundamental role as active agents of change in Ukraine's social and economic recovery.

Question 2

What measures are UN human rights organisations implementing to support vulnerable populations in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict? How are these efforts addressing the broader humanitarian needs of affected communities?

The United Nations, together with our partners, is on the ground in Ukraine to support people impacted by the war. There are 24 UN entities, around 3,000 UN personnel and almost 600 humanitarian organizations operating across all parts of the country. So far in 2024, we have reached over 7.2 million people with humanitarian assistance.

We as UNFPA focus our support on vulnerable women and girls. We help make sure that women have access to the health services and supplies they need, and that pregnant women can continue to give birth safely. Another priority for us is supporting survivors of gender-based violence to deal with trauma, access services, and rebuild lives. These are all basic human rights that we are working to uphold. We run survivor support centres across the countries and our mobile teams even reach survivors near the frontline or in remote communities. We work in partnership with Ukrainian women-led organisations who are close to their communities and know what the local needs are. In parallel, we work with the government to support longer-term social and economic recovery by helping to rebuild Ukraine's human capital. One way of doing this is training women with skills needed in traditionally male-dominated segments of the labour market, as part of our support for the implementation of Ukraine's National Demographic Strategy.

Question 3

What role can UN human rights organisations play in facilitating a peace agreement that addresses the diverse needs and concerns of women and children in Ukraine? What strategies should they employ to ensure inclusivity in the peace process?

The UN has an important role to play in advocating and facilitating for women to be included fully, equally and meaningfully not only in humanitarian and recovery efforts, but also in any peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives. This is essential, and called for by Resolution 1325 adopted by the United Nations Security Council in 2000. The Government of Ukraine already has an action plan on implementing Resolution 1325 in place. Some areas have become more prominent and urgent, such as the prevention and response to gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. UNFPA has stepped up efforts in this regard, and we are working with local women-led organisations to support women and girls, and strengthen social cohesion. Building human capital – the health, education and skills of the population – is also crucial, and empowers young people, women and older people to fully realise their potential and contribute to recovery. All of this is essential to inclusive and lasting peace.