



# Gender- Based Violence

Snapshot of Plan International's Impact  
in East and Central Europe (2022-2025)

# About Plan International's Ukraine Humanitarian Refugee Crisis Response

Plan International initiated its Ukraine Humanitarian Refugee Crisis Response immediately following the escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 by setting up operations in Poland, Moldova, and Romania. The organisation established a presence within Ukraine in August 2022 and has since been amplifying civil society partners' integrated humanitarian programming in East and Central Europe (ECE).

Plan International and partners' humanitarian response aims to reduce the vulnerabilities and risks faced by refugees, displaced and conflict-affected people inside Ukraine and host countries. Whilst providing direct life-saving humanitarian assistance, Plan International's objective is also to address structural inequalities and promote social, gender, and economic justice across ECE by increasing the resilience, well-being, and agency of girls, young people, as well as minority or non-dominant groups.

By consistently maintaining partner spending above 70%, Plan International's localised and partner-led approach has ensured faster, more contextual and sustainable delivery of assistance, whilst strengthening the long-term capacity of local civil society actors in ECE. From 2022 to 2025, this approach has allowed Plan International to reach more than 1.7 million people across 65 partners and 87 projects in four countries.

## Plan International's reach by country in ECE



## Key insights

Plan International and partners' gender-based violence (GBV) programming across ECE has evolved from initial information raising to a focus on targeting gender norms to reduce the prevalence of GBV, whilst also providing direct support to survivors of GBV:

- Whilst the provision of information has **increased awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) risks** amongst project participants, the scale-up of GBV services for survivors by Plan International and partners has ensured their protection and safety in ECE.

87K

people reached by Plan International and partners' **GBV programming** in ECE.

- More recently, programming targeting gender norms has also been used to help **reduce GBV prevalence** in Ukraine and host countries.

## Impact of GBV Interventions<sup>1</sup>

The provision of information by Plan International and partners has **increased awareness of GBV risks amongst project participants**. At the start of operations in **Ukraine**, large-scale awareness campaigns and workshops were delivered with partners. Partners employed tools including the Confidence Diary and youth-led media projects, such as "Detoxiq Show", which reached thousands of adolescents in frontline and conflict-affected regions. These efforts improved young people's knowledge of GBV risks, strengthened their personal boundaries, and encouraged help-seeking behaviours.

In **Romania** too, integrated interactive activities helped young people approach complex issues critically. The gradual shift from taboo and embarrassment to active curiosity and informed discussion allowed students to internalise messages about respect, consent, and self-awareness. They not only retained accurate information on sexual health, anatomy, and violence prevention but also shared it with peers and friends, extending the project's influence beyond the classroom.

Whilst online campaigns and informational materials raised awareness of available resources in host countries, the scale-up of GBV services for survivors by Plan International and partners has **ensured their protection and safety**. In **Moldova** and

**Romania**, for example, Plan International's partners provided shelter and safe spaces for women survivors of abuse, ensuring protection and dignity in times of crisis. Legal support and counselling also ensured women and girls regained autonomy and security in Romania. These services were inclusive of the needs of various groups: whilst refugee and migrant women received culturally sensitive assistance, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups also benefited from tailored accessibility measures to guarantee their protection. Finally, another intervention in **Romania** supported capacity-building sessions for workers in the field of domestic violence to reinforce their knowledge about topics, including restraining orders, services to combat violence against women, and support standards.

Furthermore, in the last year in ECE, Plan International has initiated programming to target gender norms to reduce the prevalence of GBV. In **Ukraine**, the implementation of the **Champions of Change (CoC)** programme reached over 500 adolescents and youth, building knowledge on gender equality, challenging harmful norms, and strengthening leadership and advocacy skills. Evidence demonstrates that the programme led to positive behavioural change, higher awareness of gender inequality, and active youth engagement in community initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> Plan International has been using an integrated approach in its humanitarian response, working across multiple programmatic areas in projects. Whilst Plan International's entire strategy and project portfolio in ECE is humanitarian, interventions including protection and education work are humanitarian and often life-saving too.

Similarly, in **Romania**, interventions also engaged men and boys in awareness campaigns, promoting positive role models and challenging societal attitudes that perpetuate violence. In **Poland**, GBV programming also transitioned from emergency case management and legal aid to a broader prevention strategy, with a deeper engagement in gender equality for long-term GBV reduction. These efforts in Ukraine, Poland, and Romania thus aligned with regional goals to address root causes and build community resilience to GBV.

## About the CoC programme

Plan International's **CoC** programme aims to promote gender equality through youth participation. Active in 41 countries, the programme seeks to empower girls and involve boys to recognise and challenge harmful, negative masculinities that sustain discrimination and inequality.<sup>ii</sup>



Participants discuss ahead of a safety walk in Warsaw as part of Plan International's 'Safer Cities' project © Plan International



# What are the key GBV needs and challenges in ECE?

## Selected findings from Plan International's research

Programmes aiming to expand responses to GBV for vulnerable groups, including adolescent girls, LGBTQI+ communities, and refugees, remain highly relevant in ECE, as indicated by Plan International's research.<sup>iii</sup>

### The threat of GBV for adolescent girls

Adolescent girls in ECE face various **protection risks**, including GBV at home, online, and in public spaces. Where Plan International conducted research, in **Ukraine, Poland, and Romania**,<sup>2</sup> girls aged 10 to 19 have expressed strong fears of experiencing SEA and have reported concerns about rape and other forms of sexual assault.

For instance, girls in **Ukraine** sometimes expressed greater concern about sexual violence than about the insecurity caused by the war itself. In **Romania and Poland**, girls reported a worrying rate of exposure to sexual harassment both in person and online, to the point that many seem to have normalised these experiences. To stay safe, girls reported adapting their behaviours by **avoiding going out at night and walking alone**.

In **Poland**, girls reported **online sexual harassment** such as "catfishing" by adult men pretending to be adolescents, receiving unsolicited nude images, requests for intimate photos, and sharing explicit images without consent. In **Ukraine**, low parental control, linked to the impacts of the war and caregivers' limited cybersecurity knowledge, increased **adolescents' risk of SEA, money fraud, and other online threats**.

### GBV and insecurity in public spaces

According to Plan International's research, adolescent girls from Ukraine in **Romania and Poland** face a high incidence of **sexual harassment and assault in public places**. This includes witnessing public mastur-

bation by adult men, catcalling, being filmed in public without consent, as well as sexual assault. Refugee girls in Romania and Poland also reported harassment from boys and men because of their nationality, showing how their visibility as refugees can make them targets for predatory individuals.

Girls and young women participating in the **Safer Cities project** in **Poland** also highlighted that they often feel threatened or unsafe in public spaces due to **gender discrimination and unequal power dynamics** between men and women. With 43% of young women in Poland experiencing at least one instance of harassment in a public space before they are 18 years old, project participants expressed frustration, feeling they must assume personal responsibility for their own safety.<sup>3</sup>

### Norms related to GBV

Findings from Plan International's research also reveal that adolescent girls reported a specific awareness of **victim-blaming attitudes**, with the lack of police protection and justice for survivors often linked to a reluctance to report crimes to the police. With some girls reiterating these attitudes themselves, this suggests that girls have internalised narratives that fail to recognise the perpetrator's role as the cause of sexual violence, leading them to think others would blame them for the violence they experience.

Although the escalation of the war in Ukraine has led to adolescents experiencing a reinforcement of traditional gender roles, there are also signs that the disruption to 'normal' life has contributed to some **shifts in gender roles and attitudes**. Across **Ukraine, Poland, and Romania**, adolescent girls exhibited a significant awareness of society's gendered expectations and how these influence the choices and experiences available to both girls and boys.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst Plan International operates in Moldova too, research was only conducted in Ukraine, Poland, and Romania. However, the protection risks faced by girls in Moldova are similar.

<sup>3</sup> The project examined the experiences faced by girls and young women in public spaces, including those from marginalised groups such as ethnic and cultural minorities, with different migration status, including refugees, from the LGBTQI+ community, people with disabilities and girls and young women of colour.



Young people take part in the 'Safeteen' workshop in Ukraine © Plan International

Similarly, some young women and adolescent girls who participated in Plan International's research on Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery in 2023 hoped that this process would serve as a **catalyst to challenge traditional gender roles**. Whilst adolescent boys and young men were generally more dismissive of gender considerations, research and programmes that tackle the war's impact on gender norms and masculinities could help prevent GBV and the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes during the country's rebuilding efforts.

#### Heightened risks for marginalised groups

In **Poland**, Plan International's evidence shows that marginalised groups faced increased GBV risks, with girls and young women with intersectional vulnerabilities encountering greater insecurity:

- Girls and young women from **ethnic minorities**, including Roma, face intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity and gender, and encounter increased risks of harassment and violence in public spaces due to racial stereotypes and biases.
- Girls and young women who are **refugees** face heightened risks to their safety due to language barriers, cultural isolation, and discrimination. This includes discrimination in schools, public spaces, and across online and in-person hate speech.

- Girls and young women from the **LGBTQI+** community face safety concerns related to homophobia, transphobia, and GBV, and experience exclusion and harassment in public spaces, which affects their sense of safety and well-being.

**Interested to learn more about GBV needs and challenges in ECE?**  
See the following reports:



[Young People on the War in Ukraine \(June 2023\)](#)



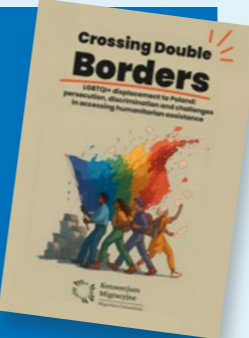
[Adolescent Girls in Crisis – Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania \(June 2024\)](#)



[Safer Cities for Girls – Policy Recommendations for a Safer Poland: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Public Spaces \(Sept 2024\)](#)



[Crossing Double Borders – LGBTQI+ displacement to Poland: Persecution, Discrimination and Challenges in Accessing Humanitarian Assistance \(June 2025\)](#)



## References

- i TeenTalks (2024) Detoxiq Show. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@TeenTalks-club/videos>.
- ii Plan International (2025) Champion of Change. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/youth-empowerment/champions-of-change/>.
- iii Plan International (2023) Young People on the War in Ukraine. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/young-people-on-the-war-in-ukraine/>; Plan International (2024) Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-in-crisis-ukraine/>; Plan International (2024) Safer Cities for Girls – Policy Recommendations for a Safer Poland: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Public Spaces. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/poland-en/publications/safety-right-now-safer-cities-for-girls/>; Plan International (2025) Crossing Double Borders – LGBTQI+ displacement to Poland: Persecution, Discrimination and Challenges in Accessing Humanitarian Assistance. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/poland-en/publications/crossing-double-borders/>.



# About

## Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.


Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

**We won't stop until we are all equal.**



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