

# OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Agency for International Development

## Ukraine Response: Assessment of USAID's Response to Staffing Challenges and Increased Programming Following Russia's Full-Scale Invasion

Report E-121-24-003-M

September 19, 2024

Evaluation



Office of Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations



## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL U.S. Agency for International Development

**DATE:** September 19, 2024

**TO:** Julie Koenen  
Mission Director  
USAID/Ukraine

**FROM:** Paul K. Martin *PKM*  
Inspector General

**SUBJECT:** Ukraine Response: Assessment of USAID's Response to Staffing Challenges and Increased Programming Following Russia's Full-Scale Invasion

This memorandum transmits the final report on our evaluation of USAID's Ukraine staffing. Our objective was to determine how USAID responded to challenges associated with its staffing footprint while implementing expanded programming due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

We hope that our findings can help inform the Agency's future work in complex crisis environments. In finalizing the report, we considered your comments on the draft and included them in their entirety in Appendix B.

We appreciate the assistance you and your staff provided to us during this engagement.

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Pursuant to Pub. L. No. 117-263 § 5274, USAID OIG provides nongovernmental organizations and businesses specifically identified in this report 30 days from the date of report publication to submit a written response to USAID OIG. Comments received will be posted on <https://oig.usaid.gov/>. Please direct inquiries to [oinotice\\_ndaa5274@usaid.gov](mailto:oinotice_ndaa5274@usaid.gov).



## Report in Brief

### Why We Did This Evaluation

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, USAID's assistance programming in the country increased by more than 224 percent by April 2023. In contrast, USAID's staffing in Ukraine shrank to 58 percent of pre-invasion levels.

We initiated this evaluation due to the increase in funding to the mission's award portfolio, potential risk of remote-managed assistance, and congressional interest in oversight of Ukraine programming.

Our objective was to determine how USAID responded to challenges associated with its staffing footprint while implementing expanded programming.

### Key Observations

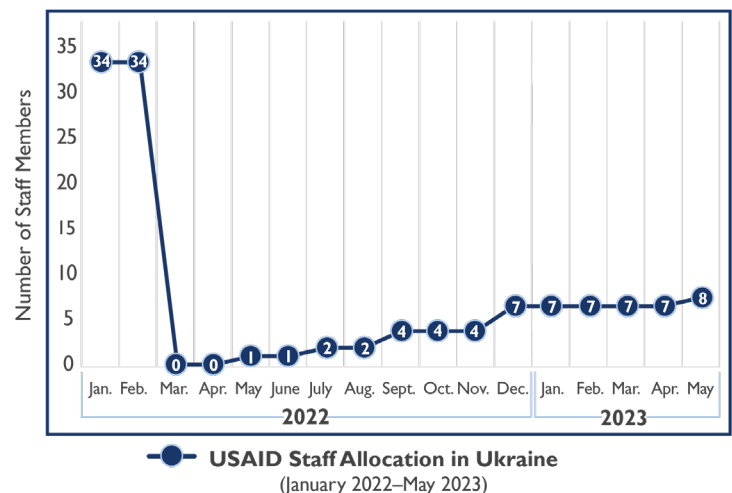
USAID addressed challenges in staffing and programming in Ukraine through multiple actions that can inform the Agency's ongoing and future work in complex crisis environments:

- Implementation of workplace flexibilities, such as staff rotations and extended temporary duty status
- Pursuit of alternative workspace
- Expansion of third-party monitoring of USAID programming
- Rapid deployment of the Disaster Assistance Response Team
- Surge and contractor staff support
- Priority bidding to fill Foreign Service Officer positions
- Strategic workforce planning that resulted in 50 new mission positions
- Transition seminar for outgoing and incoming mission staff.

### What We Found

#### USAID Took Responsible Actions to Address Staffing Challenges and Meet Increased Programming Needs in Ukraine

For about 3 months after Russia's full-scale invasion, USAID did not have a staff presence in Kyiv. Even with the phased reopening of the embassy beginning in May 2022, the State Department significantly restricted the number of U.S. government personnel in-country and their travel within Ukraine.



USAID recognized the need to add resources to meet increased humanitarian and development programming and pursued a multitiered approach to reconstitute USAID/Ukraine operations and supplement assigned Mission personnel.

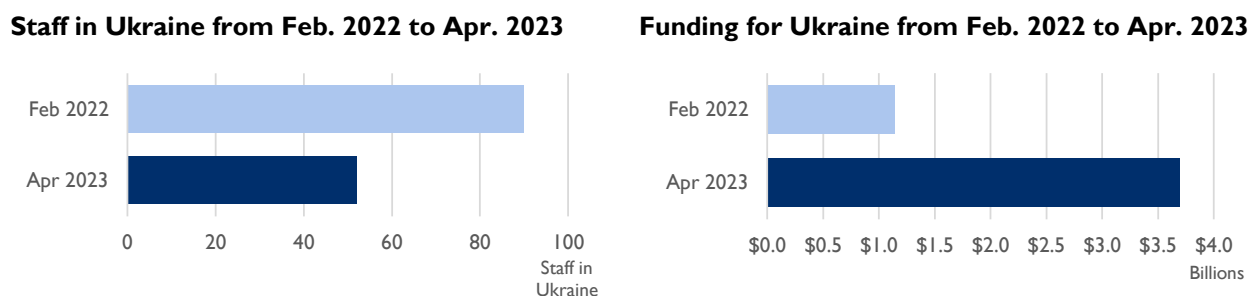
Unable to control staff allocations and travel within Ukraine during the first year after the full-scale invasion, USAID implemented workplace flexibilities such as staff rotations and extended temporary duty status, sought office space in Poland, and leveraged its existing contract for third-party monitors of USAID projects and activities. In addition, USAID/Ukraine successfully added and retained staff by bringing employees from other USAID offices to add capacity in Ukraine, offering counseling and support services to staff serving in Ukraine, holding an in-person transition seminar for incoming and outgoing staff, and developing a workforce plan to gradually increase staffing levels.

## Introduction

On February 12, 2022, the State Department ordered the departure of all nonemergency personnel from Embassy Kyiv in anticipation of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On February 28, the State Department officially suspended embassy operations and remaining USAID personnel departed Kyiv. USAID did not have a staffing presence again in Kyiv until May 2022 when the embassy began its phased reopening.

When we started our evaluation in April 2023, USAID’s assistance programming in the country had increased by more than 224 percent from approximately \$1.1 billion to approximately \$3.7 billion since the February 2022 full-scale invasion. In contrast, USAID’s staffing in Ukraine had shrunk to 58 percent of pre-invasion levels in the same period. Further, the majority of USAID/Ukraine staff worked remotely from across Ukraine and other countries. Figure I illustrates the significant increase in USAID’s funding for Ukraine while staffing in Ukraine decreased from February 2022 to April 2023.

**Figure I. Staffing and Funding Changes in Ukraine From February 2022 to April 2023**



Source: USAID staffing and programming data.

We initiated this evaluation due to the increase in funding to the mission’s award portfolio, potential risk of remote managed assistance, and congressional interest in oversight of Ukraine programming. In September 2023, we released an information brief on USAID’s Ukraine staffing and programming as a predicate to this evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Our objective for this evaluation was to determine how USAID responded to challenges associated with its staffing footprint while implementing expanded programming in Ukraine due to Russia’s full-scale invasion.

We conducted this evaluation from April 2023 through March 2024 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. The scope of our evaluation covered the changes to USAID/Ukraine staffing caused by Russia’s full-scale invasion from February 2022 through March 2024. To address the objective, we reviewed Agency policy and guidance, interviewed Agency staff, and collected and analyzed Agency data on programming and staffing at three points in time: before the full-scale invasion (February 1, 2022), more than 1 year later to coincide with the initiation of our evaluation (April 17, 2023), and more than 2 years later (March 24, 2024). In June 2023 we

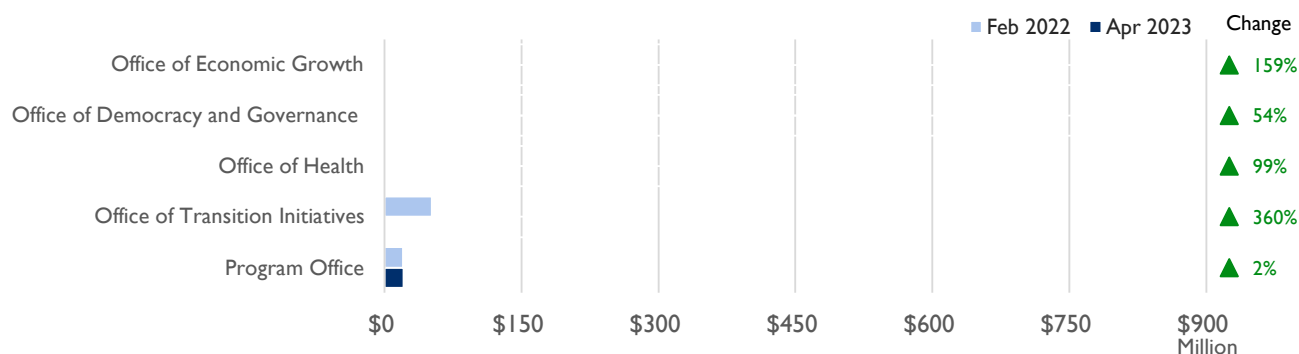
<sup>1</sup> USAID OIG, [Information Brief: USAID’s Ukraine Staffing](#), September 20, 2023.

visited Kyiv, Ukraine, and Rzeszow, Poland where we interviewed USAID mission and Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) staff and State Department officials.

## Background

Since the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion, various USAID offices coordinated to help meet Ukraine’s assistance needs. USAID’s mission in Ukraine (USAID/Ukraine) manages the portfolio for Ukraine and provides a full range of administrative, logistical, and support services. Assistance implemented and managed by USAID/Ukraine is subject to oversight and accountability requirements, including those set forth in four supplemental appropriations acts passed by Congress in fiscal years 2022 and 2023,<sup>2</sup> as well as USAID agency directives.<sup>3</sup> Pre-invasion, USAID’s development programming totaled \$1.12 billion and centered on democracy and governance, economic growth, and health. By April 2023, development programming grew to \$2.31 billion with five offices primarily managing those increases, as shown in Figure 2.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2. Development Assistance Programming From February 2022 to April 2023**



Source: USAID programming data.

Pre-invasion, USAID assigned direct hires to two 2-year tours in Ukraine, for a total of 4 years. Ukraine was an accompanied post, where direct hires could bring their eligible family members to live with them in Kyiv. USAID/Ukraine had 110 direct hires, personal service contractors (PSC)<sup>5</sup>, and foreign service national (FSN) staff.<sup>6</sup> By April 2023, the mission had 98 staff, many of whom lived and worked outside of Kyiv because the State Department restricted the total number of U.S. government personnel permitted to work within Ukraine. Figure 3 illustrates the USAID/Ukraine staffing footprint in February 2022 compared to April 2023, following the ordered departure and restrictions on U.S. government personnel working in Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> Public Law 117–103, enacted March 15, 2022; Public Law 117–128, enacted May 21, 2022; Public Law 117–180, enacted September 30, 2022; and Public Law 117–328, enacted December 29, 2022.

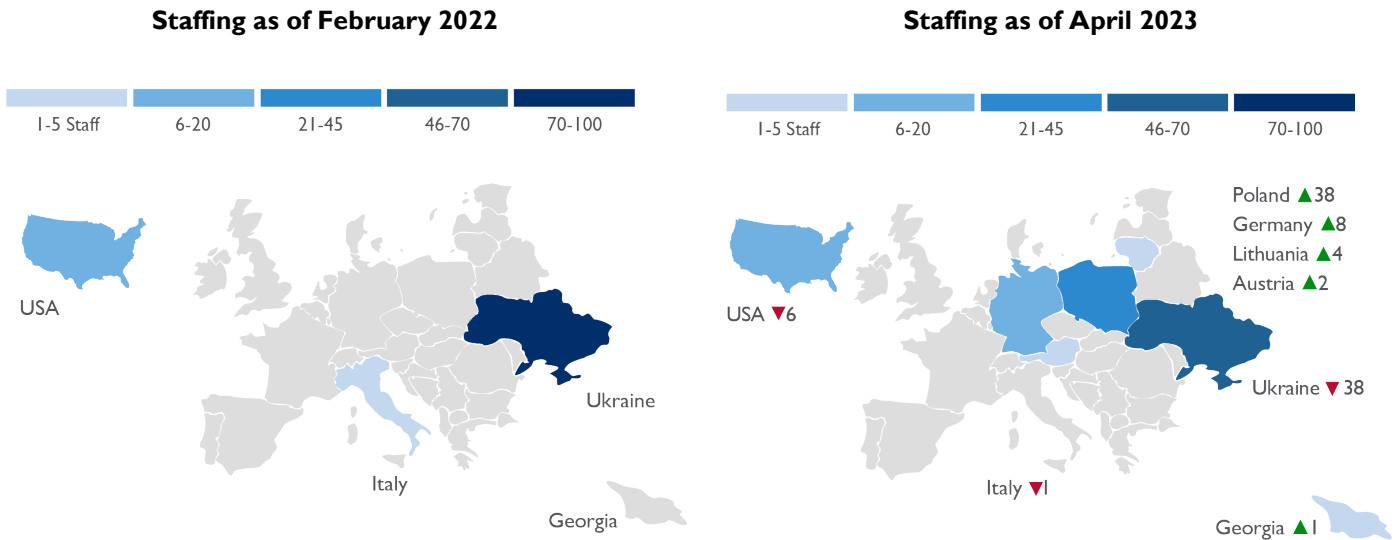
<sup>3</sup> ADS, Chapter 201, Section 3.5, “Program Monitoring,” May 2023.

<sup>4</sup> As of March 2024, USAID development programming reached over \$3.5 billion.

<sup>5</sup> For this evaluation, PSCs are defined as U.S. nationals hired under contract for personal services.

<sup>6</sup> USAID uses the term FSN for a non-U.S. citizen employee hired by a USAID mission abroad.

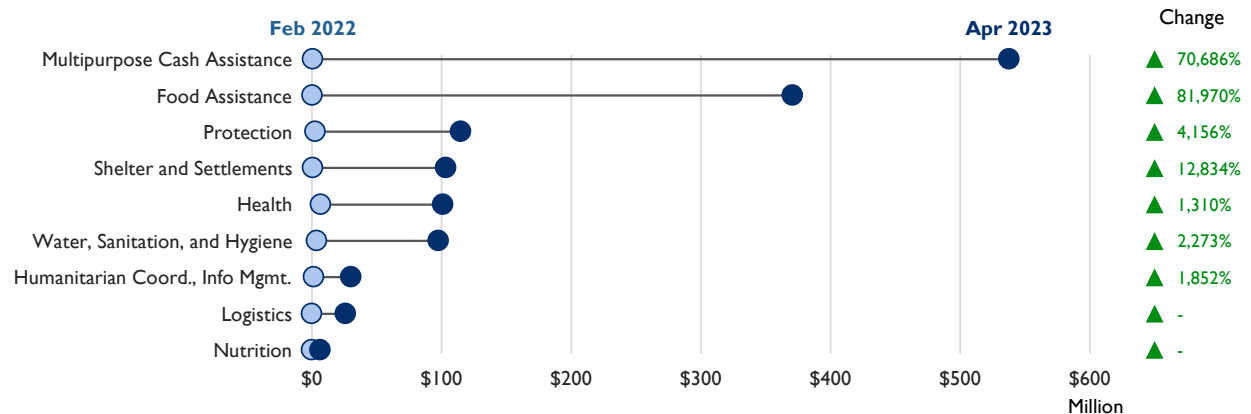
### Figure 3. Staff Location Changes in Ukraine From February 2022 to April 2023



Source: USAID staffing data.

USAID’s BHA works with Agency missions and coordinates the U.S. government’s (USG) humanitarian response to declared disasters in foreign countries. Before Russia’s full-scale invasion, BHA’s programming portfolio in Ukraine totaled about \$20.5 million with one BHA staff member present in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Humanitarian assistance funding increased substantially so that by April 2023, BHA’s portfolio in Ukraine had grown to almost \$1.4 billion, as illustrated in Figure 4, and BHA had deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to lead the USG humanitarian response.

### Figure 4. BHA Programming From February 2022 to April 2023<sup>8</sup>



Source: USAID programming data.

<sup>7</sup> As of March 2024, BHA programming reached over \$1.4 billion.

<sup>8</sup> Four previously funded program areas had not received any funding as of April 2023.

The State Department authorizes the overall direction and coordination of most U.S. foreign assistance.<sup>9</sup> The State Department also has Chief of Mission authority to direct, supervise, and coordinate all USG executive branch employees in the country or area of responsibility. USG personnel under Chief of Mission authority must comply with security policies from the Chief of Mission at all times when abroad on a mission with the USG. The State Department's Regional Security Officer is responsible for all security programs and protection functions at post, including conducting background investigations of FSN staff. The State Department also develops local compensation plans that set the salaries and benefits of FSN staff.

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## **USAID Took Responsible Actions to Address Staffing Challenges and Meet Increased Programming Needs in Ukraine**

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, USAID faced significant challenges to meet increased programming needs with a decreased in-country staffing presence. We determined that USAID took responsible actions to address these challenges. Although the State Department limited the number of staff and travel within Ukraine, USAID:

- Implemented workplace flexibilities, such as staff rotations and temporary duty status (TDY),<sup>10</sup>
- Sought office space in Poland to support staff outside Ukraine, and
- Expanded third-party monitors to oversee programming in-country.

In addition, USAID/Ukraine successfully added and retained staff to manage and monitor significant changes in programming. USAID did so through the:

- Rapid deployment of the DART and provision of staff surge support,
- Support services for FSNs,
- Priority designation of the foreign service positions and staff, transition seminars, and
- Strategic workforce planning that resulted in the addition of 50 new positions.

## **Unable to Control Staff Allocations and Travel Within Ukraine, USAID Implemented Workplace Flexibilities, Sought Office Space in Poland, and Leveraged Third-Party Monitors**

Due to security concerns, the State Department capped the total number of USG personnel permitted to work within Ukraine—including USAID—and allocated slots to U.S. agencies working in-country. The State Department has incrementally increased the staffing cap for all USG staff since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Beginning in May 2022, the State Department approved a staffing cap of 30 USG personnel to resume operations in Kyiv.

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<sup>9</sup> This includes all assistance authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (Public Law 87-195, enacted September 4, 1961) and the Arms Export Control Act (Public Law 90-629, enacted December 23, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> TDY status is official travel at least 50 miles from both employee's duty station or PSC place of performance for a period exceeding 12 hours.

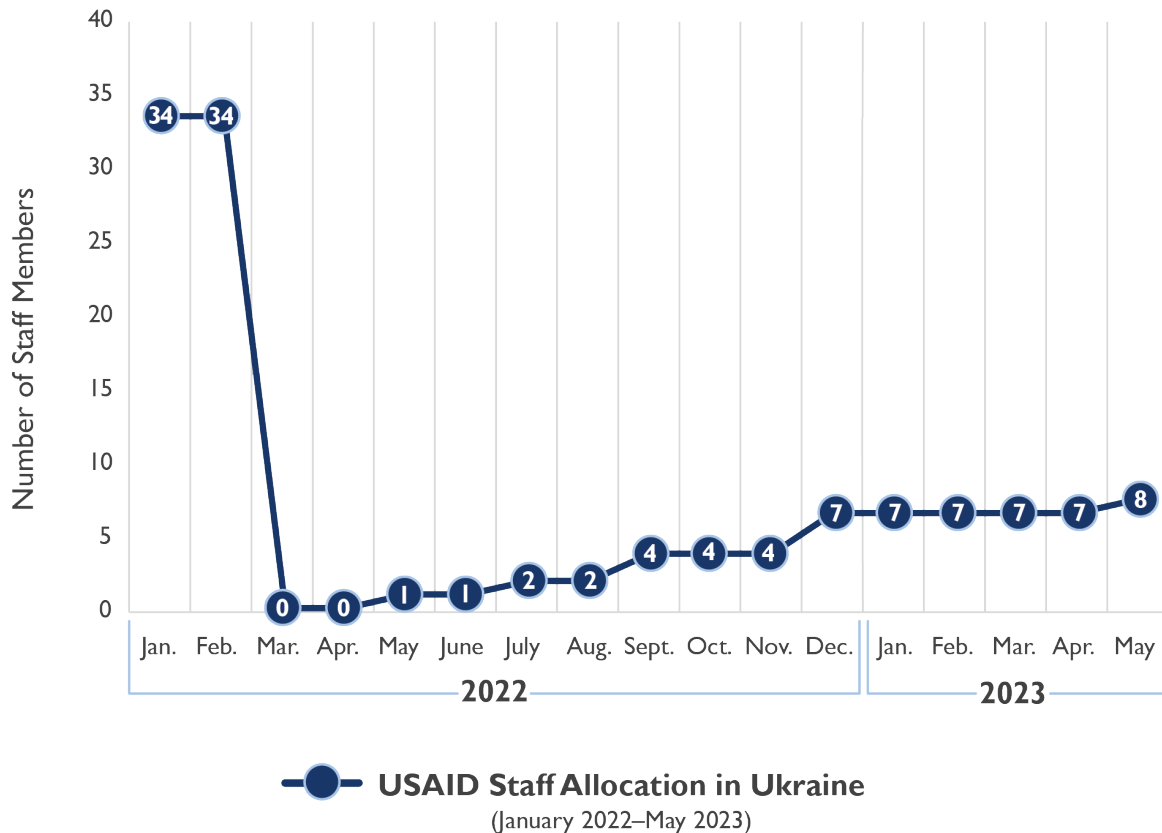


According to an Embassy official, due to the security environment, the National Security Council hesitated to approve State Department requests for a significant increase. Following periodic increases, the State Department raised the staffing cap on June 29, 2023, and again on January 11, 2024.<sup>11</sup> According to State Department personnel, even with increases to the staffing cap, space for USG personnel continued to be limited due to the need for added security resources. Although the State Department limited the number of staff and travel within Ukraine, USAID took several actions to address staffing challenges at the mission that can be replicated in similar complex crises.

### Workplace Flexibilities in Response to the Staffing Cap

The State Department increased USAID’s staffing allocations periodically, from one employee in May 2022 to eight by May 2023. Figure 5 illustrates the allocation of USAID direct hire staff and PSCs in Ukraine from the embassy’s reopening in May 2022 to May 2023.

**Figure 5. USAID Direct Hire and PSC Staff Allocation in Ukraine from May 2022 to May 2023**



Source: USAID staffing data.

USAID sought to increase its staffing allocation as the cap increased. According to the mission director, USAID occasionally received approval to bring additional staff to Kyiv temporarily when not all USG allocations were filled. As slots opened, USAID prioritized allocations for the mission director, deputy mission director, BHA senior humanitarian advisor, Office of

<sup>11</sup> Specific Embassy staffing numbers are sensitive and not for public distribution.

Transition Initiatives country representative, office directors, and deputy program officer. USAID/Ukraine also supported FSNs to enter TDY status in other countries, which the State Department approved through July 1, 2023, when they were expected to return to Kyiv.

While Kyiv was unable to accommodate larger numbers of staff and their families during the ordered departure, USAID assigned direct hire and PSC staff to extended TDY status in Washington, DC or Rzeszow, Poland. The State Department and USAID used Rzeszow, located 53 miles from the Ukrainian border, as a hub for its humanitarian assistance response and transit point while considering options for a long-term space for embassy operations and personnel. Rzeszow was selected because of its proximity to Ukraine for effective program implementation, management, and oversight of USAID/Ukraine’s portfolios.

### **PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES** *On the Ground in Kyiv (June 2023)*

Our site visit began with a 12 hour train ride from Rzeszow to Kyiv – the only route approved for U.S. government personnel. Once in Kyiv, we were told to stay within the “green zone” around the embassy. During an interview, we heard an air raid siren and had to shelter in a bunker.

The trip allowed us a glimpse into the daily lives of staff on the ground in Kyiv. They fear for their safety while working long hours. Here are some of their impressions:

- “Last week we were sitting in the basement bunker almost every night.”
- “Because of the shelling, I don’t know whether I’ll be able to sleep well at night, so my concern is how productive I will actually be when I’m in the office in the morning.”
- “It’s been nonstop, Saturday and Sunday, it just keeps going. It’s not sustainable.”
- “Folks are working 60 80 90 hours per week. ... Burnout is a real issue.”

By April 2023, when we began our evaluation, USAID/Ukraine and BHA had 21 direct hires and PSCs on rotational TDY status in Rzeszow. Given Ukraine’s unique circumstances, the State Department implemented a rotation for USG staff to spend 6 weeks in Ukraine followed by 2 weeks out. As USAID rotated one staff member out of Kyiv, it would bring in another for 2 weeks to make full use of its allocation. The rotation allowed employees reprieve from air alerts, bunkering, and intense overtime schedules by working 2 weeks in a safe office environment or taking personal leave.

In August 2023, cap numbers previously assigned to each agency served as guidance and unused space could be reassigned if authorized positions could not be filled. As of March 2024, Kyiv could host 64 authorized USAID direct hire and PSC staff.

### ***Pursuit of a Long-Term Regional Platform***

While the number of staff in Ukraine was limited, the State Department and USAID weighed options for a regional platform outside of the country. According to internal USAID/Ukraine planning material, speed in identifying and setting up a new platform nearby that met staffing needs was key to retaining its American and Ukrainian staff. Agency staff mentioned it was difficult to find

working space in the same time zone for effective program implementation, management, and oversight (including monitoring) of its USAID/Ukraine portfolio.

According to several USAID officials, the State Department was indecisive about where to establish a platform. Therefore, USAID's Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, which provides technical support and represents the field mission in Washington, DC, proposed establishment of a regional platform mission office in Warsaw and entered into a letter of intent for a commercial space in September 2022. However, according to a USAID Management Bureau official, the embassy said its management platform could not support a more permanent USAID structure in Warsaw.

During our site visit, several staff expressed security concerns with the commercial space in Rzeszow and that it was operationally inadequate to serve as a long-term office space for USAID staff. Rzeszow also lacked the infrastructure, e.g., housing and schooling, needed to accommodate a long-term presence with direct hires and their families.

In August 2023, Embassies Kyiv and Warsaw moved the external support platform from Rzeszow to Krakow, Poland.

### ***Expansion of Third-Party Monitoring of USAID Projects and Activities***

In a March 2023 memorandum to the ambassador, the mission director stated, the “low staff footprint together with stringent security requirements ... seriously risk jeopardizing [their] oversight and accountability responsibility.” According to the mission director, USAID needed adequate staff in-country to oversee the more than 50 implementers operating throughout Ukraine, but USAID was strictly limited in its ability to travel outside of Kyiv due to security restrictions. The State Department's Regional Security Officer sets an area outside of the embassy compound as a safe area, or “green zone,” and USG personnel must request and receive Regional Security Officer approval to travel outside this green zone. As of March 2024, all travel by USG personnel to and within Ukraine required approval by the State Department's undersecretary for management.

With staff movements limited within and outside of Kyiv, USAID leveraged its pre-existing monitoring and learning support contract for third-party monitoring, including conducting site visits of USAID projects and activities.<sup>12</sup> Many staff members we interviewed said that even though the Agency used third-party monitoring, more staff were needed in Ukraine to conduct site visits to provide oversight of USAID programs.

Rather than waiting to solicit and award a new contract for monitoring, USAID/Ukraine leveraged its existing monitoring contract to address the surge in programming and build out the mission's oversight approach. For several years, our oversight reports have identified improving program monitoring as an Agency top management challenge<sup>13</sup> and have emphasized

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<sup>12</sup> In February 2020, USAID awarded a 5-year contract to Encompass LLC to assist USAID/Ukraine's overall monitoring.

<sup>13</sup> USAID OIG, [Top Management Challenges Facing USAID in Fiscal Year 2023](#), November 16, 2022; USAID OIG, [Top Management Challenges Facing USAID in Fiscal Year 2021](#), November 13, 2020; and USAID OIG, [Top Management Challenges Fiscal Year 2019](#), November 2018.

that there are impediments to effective oversight and monitoring in conflict areas and during complex emergencies.<sup>14</sup>

## **USAID/Ukraine Successfully Added and Retained Staff to Manage and Monitor Significant Changes in Programming After Russia’s Full-Scale Invasion**

By April 2023 when we started our evaluation, development programming totaled \$2.31 billion while BHA programming totaled \$1.4 billion. This represented an increase in award programming of 224 percent in Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. At the same time, USAID/Ukraine experienced a 12 percent decrease in mission staff, from 110 in February 2022 to 98 in April 2023. USAID/Ukraine successfully added and retained staff to manage and monitor significant changes in programming by leveraging several flexibilities. As of March 2024, USAID/Ukraine had made progress in adding and filling positions, with a total of 133 staff.

### ***Rapid DART Deployment and Surge Support***

The Agency leveraged BHA’s DART to help meet humanitarian assistance needs. On February 24, 2022, the same day Russia launched its full-scale invasion, BHA deployed a DART to lead the USG humanitarian response in Ukraine and activated a response management team in Washington, DC to support the DART. The size and membership of the DART fluctuated with short-term staff rotations. On April 2023, the DART had 17 members with the team leader and two coordinators located in Kyiv and nearly all other staff working from Rzeszow. As of March 2024, BHA’s Ukraine response had increased to 37 members with 14 in Kyiv, 21 working from Washington, DC and 2 working from TDY in other cities. This updated DART included 10 institutional support contractors.

The mission used surge staff and contracting to rapidly respond despite its inability to quickly increase mission staffing. According to USAID/Ukraine staff, the Agency implemented the following measures:

- Brought in staff from other missions and offices to provide additional support.
- Activated the Lead Integration for Global Health Technical Information Group-Ukraine as an incident management team (on March 7, 2022) to coordinate Bureau for Global Health’s programs and strategy for all health needs resulting from Russia’s full-scale invasion.
- Established an executive officer surge support team (around September 2022) to support the administrative management of the mission given the rapid and significant changes in

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<sup>14</sup> USAID OIG, [Humanitarian Assistance in Yemen: Opportunities Exist for USAID to Further Strengthen Its Risk Management Process](#) (8-199-22-003-P), August 23, 2022.

USAID OIG, [Weaknesses in Oversight of USAID’s Syria Response Point To the Need for Enhanced Management of Fraud Risks in Humanitarian Assistance](#) (8-000-21-001-P), March 4, 2021.

USAID OIG, [USAID’s Award Oversight Is Insufficient To Hold Implementers Accountable for Achieving Results](#) (9-000-19-006-P), September 25, 2019.

budget, human capital, program support, and other related mission needs following Russia's full-scale invasion.

- Hired 12 institutional support contractors (as of April 17, 2023) including a technical advisor, procurement specialist, and travel specialist to assist mission staff. According to USAID officials, this allowed the mission to quickly add staff without requiring State Department approvals. However, as contractors, they cannot perform inherently governmental functions such as managing USAID development or humanitarian activities.

### ***Support Services to Retain Local Staff***

Since the beginning of the Russia's full-scale invasion, the Embassy and USAID/Ukraine have tried to find ways to support and assist FSN staff—both inside and outside Ukraine—with the unprecedented and unpredictable challenges they faced every day. From the early days of the invasion, USAID provided all FSN staff, whether in Ukraine or another country, with IT and communications resources and devices, e.g., laptops that have enabled them to continue their work in support of USAID's development and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

Multiple Embassy and USAID Town Halls were arranged to share information and to hear from FSN staff. Mission leadership said these sessions were invaluable in helping the USG determine how best to support its staff. In addition, USAID has held several professional employee counseling/support services sessions for Ukraine and provided contact details for specific services. However, several FSNs acknowledged that these sessions were a good effort, but they did not think these sessions were useful either because of cultural differences or a desire to depend on family and friends instead.

From the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion, USAID took a variety of actions to support and retain its in-country FSN staff.

- In February 2022, USAID covered some emergency preparedness and relocation expenses incurred or expected to be incurred by the USAID/Ukraine Regional Mission's FSN staff.

### **PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES** ***Foreign Service Nationals***

- “I think COVID helped to some extent. We were already working remotely when the war started. We had developed communication, regular check ins, to communicate effectively.”
- “USAID was more equipped than State [Department] because we already had our equipment in hand, our technical platforms like Google suite has been working very well for us. We continued working wherever we ended up being, in Ukraine or abroad.”
- “The USAID took care of us. Maybe not immediately, but they eventually made it so that people could leave with children, given meals and incidental expense, so they could afford things, go on TDY, etc. On Feb 21, we heard explosions and gun fights which was scary ... Separation from families is the other difficult thing ... Then when Russia realized they could not win on the battlefield, they bombed hospitals, schools, and infrastructure.”
- “We had huge electricity cuts, no heat. ... The USAID EXO office was so nice they gave us batteries and power banks, modems to connect to the internet.”

- In February 2022, USAID/Ukraine established a “senior FSNs in charge” group as an open forum for FSNs to raise concerns with USAID/Ukraine leadership.
- In February 2022, USAID authorized a Unique Conditions of Work Allowance for FSNs located in Ukraine to receive an additional 10 percent of their basic salary for approximately 3 months. It was applicable to employees working full time, part time, and intermittent workweek schedules and was paid when employees were on annual, sick, or other approved paid leave.
- Effective March 23, 2022, USAID designated all FSN staff of U.S. government agencies that follow the Embassy’s Joint Local Compensation Plan as caretaker FSN staff. The caretaker status ensured that all FSNs would continue to be employed for 6 months during the period of suspended operations. Caretaker FSN staff were expected to perform duties only if these duties could be performed in a relatively safe manner but they were allowed to keep their full salary, benefits, and leave.
- USAID assisted its male employees to apply for mandatory military enlistment waivers.

At the onset of the invasion, USAID placed FSN staff who fled Ukraine on TDY status in 12 countries. By June 2023, FSN staff were on TDY status in four countries and throughout Ukraine. The State Department approved FSNs for TDY status through July 1, 2023, when they were expected to return to Kyiv. Of the USAID FSNs, most chose to return to Kyiv rather than resigning or taking leave without pay. As of March 2024, all FSNs worked from Kyiv except for eight FSNs who took leave without pay and one was on TDY.

### ***Management of Staff Departures and Transitions***

Of the \$57.9 billion appropriated to State Department and USAID, \$43.5 billion (75 percent) has been allocated to USAID. According to the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, increased assistance programming impacted the entire mission and led to burnout and increased levels of stress and anxiety. Several USAID/Ukraine and DART staff members we interviewed confirmed that they worked consistently long hours in an insecure environment, resulting in burnout. Many USAID/Ukraine and DART staff stated that they felt short-staffed and needed to shoulder a tremendous workload when the programming portfolio grew and urgent assignments arose.

In summer 2023, USAID/Ukraine experienced a 77 percent turnover in direct hires’ positions (20 of 23), with 9 staff ending their assignments early. Staff considered Ukraine a great family post before the full-scale invasion. When the 4-year family post turned into a war zone in which families were unable to reside, employees were expected to spend significant time in Kyiv and/or Poland, leaving their families on their own. In September 2022, Ukraine became an unaccompanied post and a one-tour (2-year) assignment.<sup>15</sup> Several staff members we interviewed mentioned that not being able to stay with their families was a significant morale issue and led to requests to end their assignments early. One employee expressed that had there been an option for a stable long-term platform, USAID would have more continuity of staffing.

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<sup>15</sup> In August 2023, the tour length shortened to 1 year.

USAID designated nine mission positions as priority in the 2023 foreign service assignment cycle major listing, placing them in the category of positions that 2023 eligible bidders were required to bid on.<sup>16</sup> According to USAID/Ukraine staff, the Agency filled almost all its open direct hires positions.

According to internal USAID planning materials, staffing stability is key to retaining talent and ensuring impactful programming, particularly as the disruption caused by evacuations has been immense and at a time when their in-depth knowledge is essential to ramping up programming. In May 2023, USAID/Ukraine proactively organized an in-person seminar to support the handover of key roles and responsibilities from the outgoing to the incoming staff. This 4-day seminar about a successful transition was attended by 40 staff. In February 2024, the mission's monitoring and learning support contractor, EnCompass LLC, published a learning brief presenting key processes, tools, preparations, and lessons learned from the strategic transition planning seminar. In June 2024, the Agency shared the learning brief during an internal event highlighting USAID/Ukraine's knowledge handover processes and efforts. USAID OIG previously identified the need for such orientation and handover in USAID/South Sudan, another complex crisis environment with regular staff turnover.<sup>17</sup>

### **Strategic Workforce Planning**

USAID pursued a multitiered approach to reconstituting USAID/Ukraine operations and personnel to meet humanitarian and development programmatic needs in Ukraine. In December 2022, USAID conducted a strategic staffing plan exercise to determine appropriate USAID/Ukraine staffing levels. In March 2023, USAID/Ukraine requested and later received State Department approval for 50 new positions: 40 FSNs, 4 direct hires, and 6 PSCs. Although the mission was hiring new FSNs, according to USAID/Ukraine staff, it faced obstacles to recruitment including prospective FSNs leaving Ukraine due to the war, the risk of mandatory military enlistment, and the lengthy background investigation process. However, as of March 2024, USAID/Ukraine had filled 29 of the 50 positions (see Table I). This brought the mission's total staffing to 133, representing a total increase in mission staff of approximately 30 percent since Russia's full-scale invasion in late February 2022. The total staffing number does not include the DART members who continue to support the Ukraine response but are not considered mission staff.

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<sup>16</sup> Foreign service officers go through a bidding process whereby they rank their preferred posts/positions. Their submissions are taken into consideration along with the Agency's needs to then make an assignment to USAID posts worldwide and in Washington, DC.

<sup>17</sup> USAID OIG, [Inspection of USAID/South Sudan's ICASS Service Provision in Juba](#) (E-668-23-002-M), September 28, 2023.

**Table I. Status of New Approved USAID/Ukraine Positions as of March 2024**

New Positions	Direct hires	USPSC	FSN	Total
Onboarded	3	2	24	29
Selection Made	0	1	10	11
Recruiting	1	3	4	8
No Action	0	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: USAID staffing data.

### ***USAID Staff's Positive Assessment of Agency's Mission Execution***

We asked 30 USAID/Ukraine and BHA staff to rate USAID's execution of its mission since Russia's full-scale invasion on a scale of 1 to 5. Most staff (67 percent) provided a rating of 5 while the remaining (33 percent) said 4 or 4.5.

- 20 staff (67 percent) gave USAID the highest rating of 5 because people were still working and delivering good results during this stressful situation and while dealing with different challenges.
- 6 staff (20 percent) rated USAID at a level of 4.5, saying that there is always a room for improvement.
- 4 staff (13 percent) rated USAID at a level of 4 because they still believed the Agency did a good job considering the circumstances.

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## **Conclusion**

USAID was charged with rapidly adapting its operations in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A decreased staff footprint, obstacles in relocating staff, and stringent security requirements posed challenges to USAID's efforts to provide oversight of the significant increases in programming. Nevertheless, the Agency took responsible actions to address these challenges, including by leveraging existing flexibilities such as extended TDY's and rotations, and expanding the use of the existing third-party monitoring contract to continue operations while ensuring the safety and security of USAID personnel and their families.

Our key observations regarding how USAID addressed challenges in staffing and programming during this volatile period in Ukraine can help inform the Agency's continued and future work in other complex crisis environments.



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## Appendix A. Scope and Methodology

We conducted this evaluation from April 2023 through March 2024 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. The scope of our evaluation was the changes to USAID/Ukraine staffing caused by the Russia's full-scale invasion from February 2022 through March 2024.

Our evaluation objective was to examine how USAID responded to challenges associated with its staffing footprint while implementing expanded programming due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

To address the objective, we reviewed Agency policy, guidance, and communications related to the Ukraine mission, programming, humanitarian assistance, and ordered departure. We collected and analyzed Agency data on funding, programming, and staffing from three points in time:

- Prior to the full-scale invasion (February 1, 2022),
- More than 1 year after (April 17, 2023), and
- More than 2 years after (March 24, 2024).

We conducted a series of preliminary interviews with U.S.-based and USAID/Ukraine staff remotely, and in June 2023, we visited Kyiv, Ukraine, and Rzeszow, Poland, where we interviewed USAID direct hires, PSC, and FSN staff, and State Department officials.

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## Appendix B. Agency Comments



### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Amy Burns, Audit Director, USAID Office of Inspector General  
Washington, DC

**FROM:** Europe and Eurasia Acting Assistant Administrator, Lisa Magno /s/

**DATE:** September 10, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Management Comments to Respond to the Draft Evaluation Report on Assessment of USAID's Response to Staffing Challenges and Increased Programming Following Russia's Full-Scale Invasion (Report E-121-24-003-M; Task No. EE1U0223)

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#### **Ukraine Mission Response:**

On behalf of USAID/Ukraine, I extend our gratitude for your comprehensive report recognizing the significant efforts of USAID to support our team and operations since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Your report highlights crucial aspects of our operations, and we are heartened by your recognition of our ongoing efforts despite operating in such a challenging environment.

**Acknowledging USAID's Staffing Efforts.** We greatly appreciate your acknowledgment of USAID's ongoing and multi-dimensional efforts to ensure that staffing levels remain appropriate despite operating in a dynamic and volatile war zone. Maintaining effective staffing in such conditions requires not only strategic foresight but also adaptability and resilience. Your recognition of our efforts highlights the dedication and innovation of our team members -- in Washington and in Ukraine alike -- who have worked tirelessly to ensure that we are staffed and equipped to meet the ever-evolving demands of our mission.

To address staffing challenges, in February 2024 USAID approved a Special Bidding Opportunity (SBO) for 20 vacant Ukraine positions and successfully filled those in a relatively short span of time (seven months).

**Recognizing the Human Dimensions.** Your report’s attention to the human dimensions of working in a war zone is profoundly appreciated. Both Ukrainian and American staff face unique and significant challenges, and we value your recognition of the physical, emotional and psychological toll that such environments can impose. At USAID, we are deeply committed to providing comprehensive support to our personnel, understanding that their well-being is essential to our collective success. Your acknowledgment of these efforts reinforces the importance of our ongoing initiatives to maintain a productive and supportive work environment. It also underscores the shared humanity of our staff members who, despite the adversity, continue to perform with remarkable dedication and professionalism.

**Recognizing the Partnership Between USAID/Ukraine and USAID Headquarters.** Collaboration between USAID headquarters and the Mission in Kyiv has been the cornerstone of our operational success and effectiveness. Your report captures the essence of how this synergy enabled us to respond dynamically to the needs on the ground while ensuring that our strategies and resources are well-aligned with field realities while ensuring that the resources provided by American taxpayers are spent wisely. The collaborative efforts between our field operations and central support have been integral to addressing the complex challenges of our mission. Your acknowledgment of this partnership highlights the strength and efficacy of our integrated approach, which is crucial for continuing to achieve our objectives in a highly dynamic environment.

**Personal Perspectives:** The testimonials under “Personal Perspective” clearly depicted the challenging operating environment in and around the June 2023 timeframe. While the security environment remains very dynamic on the ground in Ukraine, the staffing cap increase and plus-up in numbers of both Ukrainian and American staff in the Mission has provided relief to the existing workforce and provides the prospect of eventually achieving a more sustainable work pace.

**Pursuit of a Long Term Regional Platform-Recognizing the partnership between the U.S. Embassy and USAID Mission:** The U.S. Embassy in Ukraine and the USAID Mission in Kyiv share a strong partnership that highlights a commitment to address the pressing challenges faced by Ukraine, particularly in light of ongoing Russian aggression. This collaborative approach was key in deciding or not deciding to stand up a Ukraine support platform. The Embassy weighed several options on where to establish a new Ukraine support platform and ultimately took a

wait and see approach. As the situation on the ground evolved rapidly it was determined that Warsaw was not a proper fit for the USAID Mission.

**Support Services to Retain Local Staff:** As USAID pursued a multitiered approach to reconstituting USAID/Ukraine operations and to support and retain its in-country FSN staff, USAID also ensured that adequate support was available to the FSN staff to navigate and comply with the Ukrainian Law and Embassy guidance for male employees working for international and diplomatic organizations, for example assisting them to apply for mandatory military enlistment waivers.

In conclusion, this report serves as both an affirmation of USAID Ukraine's efforts and a motivating force for our continued commitment. We are grateful for your thorough evaluation and for the recognition of the hard work and dedication of all those involved in our mission. The insights provided will undoubtedly guide us as USAID strives to further enhance our operations and support our personnel -- in Ukraine and in other crisis-affected countries.

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## Appendix C. Major Report Contributors

Members of the evaluation team include:

- Amy Burns, Inspections and Evaluations Director
- Alexandra Miller, Assistant Director
- Paul Donnelly, Lead Analyst
- Olga Vaclavik, Lead Analyst

The evaluation team would also like to acknowledge contributions from Jillisa Milner, John “Jack” Nelson, Kaitlin O’Hara, Tovah Rom, and Stacey Taylor.



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