

## EKHA and EKPF open letter to EU policy makers

### 'Protecting Chronic Kidney Disease patients amid the conflict in Ukraine'

Brussels, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

*To Ms Stella Kyriakides, EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety*

*To Mr Janez Lenarčič, EU Commissioner for Crisis Management*

*To Ms Mariya Gabriel, EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth*

Dear EU Commissioners,

In the wake of the escalating conflict in Ukraine, we are writing, on behalf of the European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA) and the European Kidney Patients' Federation (EKPF) to alert you about the extremely worrying situation of **Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) patients** on site and in neighbouring countries. In a country with more than 40 million inhabitants, full-scale hostilities can have shattering consequences for the population, in particular for patients requiring constant care and well-functioning health infrastructures. All chronic disease patients in/or fleeing Ukraine are currently facing an increased risk of mortality and morbidity and deserve our urgent attention.

As you may know, kidney patients in need of dialysis or having a renal transplant are particularly vulnerable in these settings. In Ukraine, they represent 10,000 patients. Dialysis requires substantial quantities of **energy and water**, the delivery of a broad array of therapeutics and a reliable transportation system. During armed conflicts, energy and water delivery sources are very likely to be destroyed and transports possibilities reduced/eliminated. Unfortunately, local media report that this is already happening in Ukraine, with the provision of dialysis being severely disrupted. In addition, transplanted and dialysis patients have an immune-depressed status that put them at greater risk of catching infections. Often in long-lasting conflicts, infectious diseases tend to rapidly spread due to the lack of access to fresh water, sanitation and a steady food supply. All of this is undoubtedly putting CKD patients in a life-threatening situation.

Many civilians are already leaving Ukraine to seek safety. For CKD patients, this means fleeing towards a stable place where they will be able to receive dialysis at least 3 times a week. Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Moldova are currently providing essential care to dialysis and transplanted refugees from Ukraine but there are fears that their local health infrastructures will be soon overwhelmed by the mass influx of displaced people. This may imply missed treatments and further needs for hospitalisations. Furthermore, Acute Kidney Failure among both military and civilians is frequent during wars, which can overload treatment capacities and contribute to the overall death toll. Regrettably, most European healthcare professionals are not sufficiently prepared to take care of kidney patients in war circumstances.

We welcome the health pillar of the €90 million emergency assistance package that the European Commission has committed to provide to Ukraine. We also appreciate the delivery of material assistance comprising essential medical care items via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. This swift reaction from EU leaders shows that our European values of unity and solidarity remain stronger than ever. As the delivery of EU humanitarian assistance is underway, we ask you to pay a particular attention to vulnerable population such as CKD patients and ensure the provision of:

- **Safe and reliable life-saving therapies** and medication to all CKD patients on the ground and fleeing to surrounding countries,
- **Rapid training** for relevant healthcare professionals on how to take care of CKD patients in time of war and on the prevention and control of infections,
- **Telemedicine** equipment to maintain the continuity of care (when possible) so as to avoid travelling long distance amid conflict zones,
- **Mental health support** to patients and healthcare professionals who are at immediate risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other stress-related conditions,
- **Free access to care** to all refugees arriving in another EU country,
- **Facilitated air transport** to other EU countries in situations where the health infrastructures of surrounding countries become overloaded.

Much in the same way as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine is casting light on the **vulnerability of the current dialysis concept**, which requires most patients to travel to a health facility several times a week. In a war context, this brings additional risks to patients and pressure on over-stretched healthcare systems. **There is an urgent need for more prevention, transplantation and an innovative and greener dialysis concept.**

We trust that you will consider these successive threats to European health security as a supplementary reason to foster research into home-based dialysis systems that are more flexible and less dependent in water and energy. Only bold investments can lead to game-changing results.

In this fast-evolving and complex context, the health of our neighbours from Ukraine must remain our priority. **On behalf of EKHA and EKPF, we stand ready to support any action** that you may take to help CKD patients in the region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Raymond Vanholder, EKHA President



Daniel Gallego, EKPF President