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THE DARK SIDE OF FASHION
IMPACTS ON CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

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Rosie Hunter | Ikon Images

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Reuters | Akinunde Akinleye

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comment

An author recently told me that a journalist of their acquaintance had questioned – rather superciliously – why the *CRJ* does not engage



in political reporting. I can assure the journalist that this is entirely intentional and will always be one of the main principles of this publication. Why? Democracy is fragile and must be nurtured; it is essential to any well-functioning country. Yet many political systems have evolved in ways that preclude meaningful long-term planning, particularly in the areas of national and societal resilience, disaster mitigation and prevention. As Eric McNulty says on p12: "Politicians think in electoral cycles. The action needed to address emerging risks is more urgent and requires consideration of longer time horizons." In many countries, the roles of ministers or mayors are frequently shuffled; sometimes they don't get to spend enough time on an issue to gain a true understanding of the complexities. And any policies – however bold, enlightened or effective – are at risk of reversal or of being dropped by incoming governments or new incumbents. Sadly, this can often be because the spending increases required are 'politically' unpalatable.

This the opposite of what is needed, especially when it comes to the complex and multidisciplinary breadth of what the *CRJ* covers. These critical areas are far too important to be swayed by partisan, often diametrically opposed ideological agendas. Preserving lives, the environment and economies should not be subject to petty politics, unquestioning tribalism or point scoring.

I was astounded at the naïveté of the comment. It is clearly wrong to think that 'politics' alone holds the solutions as the "risk picture darkens," (Bruce Mann, p8). At best, this view is misguided. At worst, it is profoundly ignorant of what is required to grasp the intricacies of – and interconnections within – this field.

Which is why *CRJ* is so proud of its independence, neutrality and lack of political commentary. Our reports and insights provide reasoned, nuanced analysis written by – and for – the people who are dedicated to improving the safety of individuals, communities, businesses and the governments they work for. Let's listen to the experts.

Lessons learned in Ukraine

Within 72 hours of Russian forces launching their military offensive on Ukraine, **Dan Kaine** was deployed to the region to analyse the situation and to assess how his risk advisory firm could assist and respond

My primary objective was to gain some ground truth as opposed to relying on conflicting private industry intelligence reports or international news broadcasts. Almost all of these reports were incorrect. Before I deployed, I was under the impression that it was impossible to cross the border into Ukraine, that vehicles were difficult to find and that there were severe fuel shortages. All of this was false.

Humanitarian agencies arriving in the region were under the same impression. Many arrived with fuel cans strapped to their vehicles. Fuel has been abundantly available in western Ukraine and surrounding countries the entire time. The lessons learned for many organisations have been costly and, with prior planning and preparation, could have been determined faster and more cost effectively.

Upon arrival in Hungary I quickly determined that this was not a suitable country from which to launch evacuation or humanitarian operations, so I flew to Poland.

In complex environments, networking is key. During conflicts or natural emergencies, embassies, media agencies, NGO executives and even high net worth individual stakeholders all congregate at staging areas, typically in the more premium hotel(s).

Rzeszow quickly became the main hub for organisations assessing whether they were needed in Ukraine, with its airport being used by NATO to land troops and equipment in the region, and cargo flights landing to bring aid into the country.

In Poland, I booked into a former palace in Sieniawa, less than a 30-minute drive to the border with Ukraine. It was remote, and I arrived late at night not knowing if I had made the right choice.

At breakfast the following morning however, seeing almost every table full, I knew I was in the right place. Pałac Sieniawa had become a hub for foreign embassies, the UN, international media and other organisations. The restaurant resembled an operations room, with maps on the walls, laptops open, phones ringing and people whispering among themselves.

Within 12 hours of arriving in Poland, I crossed into Ukraine with an embassy team. The insight gained from driving the route, crossing the border and understanding the process was invaluable. But most eye-opening was seeing queues of women, children and the elderly, six-miles long, four or five people deep, inching forward in the snow and rain, waiting to be processed into Poland.

This process was somewhat delayed by an unintended consequence of well-meaning people. Vehicles started showing up in the thousands – many filled with food, water and clothing – overwhelming the border crossing points. Border guards and customs agents had to be

redirected to process an influx of vehicles and aid into the country, rather than processing people out.

Unfortunately, almost half of this aid was not essential, especially perishable food items, which needed to be disposed of, and impractical clothing items, which to this day sit in mountains of garments dotted around border crossing points and along evacuation routes.

Another unfortunate consequence was that this influx of aid inadvertently enabled human traffickers to operate undetected, targeting victims while police resources were diverted into directing traffic, patrolling car parks, resolving conflicts (between volunteers) and acting as liaison officers, rather than monitoring and investigating suspicious behaviour.

Predators & traffickers

One example was a middle-aged male at the Medyka border crossing point in Poland holding a sign that read: 'Space for 16 people to come and live in sunny Spain'. Rather than welcoming the first 16 people who approached him, he was choosing who could go with him – all of them young and female. This took place next to two police officers who were preoccupied with finding the owners of volunteer aid vehicles with foreign plates that had been parked illegally and were blocking traffic.

Border crossing officers were also placed in an extremely unfamiliar environment in dealing with vehicles full of cargo typically categorised on Ukraine's 'sensitive items' list, including body armour, Kevlar helmets, night vision and thermal imaging sights, satellite communications equipment, and even weapons and ammunition.

It wasn't uncommon to see four or five different border and customs officers searching a vehicle, checking paperwork and making phone calls. In the early days of the conflict, there was no formal process; now that one is in place, there are instances of staff and volunteers being detained for not following the correct protocols.

From a risk advisory firm perspective, this has not come as a surprise. We have been providing regular pre-travel safety briefings to media, NGO, logistics and security companies before they deploy to Ukraine and were regularly questioned whether they needed to wear body armour and helmets between the airport and their hotel (in Poland).

Rzeszow is a beautiful city in a country that is not at war. The fact that these questions were being asked, often the day before travelling, highlights just how ill-prepared many organisations deploying to the region were.

When representatives from these organisations did arrive, almost everyone had the same three questions. Where are we going, how are we going to get there, and what are we going to do when we get there?



One request organisations made several times was whether they could be transported into Ukraine to show potential donors that they had crossed the border to validate their 'mission', with the hopes of securing further funding. This is not unusual. It could be viewed as an 'ambulance chasing' mentality, but not-for-profit organisations rely on donors or grants, fuelled by PR and social media, so it is a vicious circle.

One major risk factor for most organisations and volunteers who have entered Ukraine is that they have done so completely uninsured, often with no medical rescue or evacuation plan, and no medical treatment coverage once back in Poland, Hungary or Romania. And they have no dismemberment or disability benefits.


Despite the conflict, which at the time of writing had claimed the lives of 18 journalists and seriously injured 13, the primary risk for non-frontline organisations is still assessed to be road traffic collisions. There are several factors to take into consideration, including extremely poor road conditions, long driving times, unconventional road driving styles and unfamiliar road signs.

As more organisations enter areas where fighting has taken place, the risks of triggering mines, booby traps and unexploded ordnance have increased dramatically.

Another risk is unguarded talk when discussing future plans, mentioning times, dates and locations, particularly in bars, restaurants and hotel rooms (with very thin walls). In Rzeszow, intelligence reports suggest that not only

Russian GRU Intelligence Officers, but also operatives from Wagner Group – a paramilitary unit used by the Russian Government – have been operating in the region.

An observation that we have included in all our risk assessments is the signage that organisations are placing on their vehicles. To a conscripted, illiterate soldier from a distance, 'TV' and 'UN' in a foreign alphabet can be mistaken for a Z, A or a V – all vehicle identifiers for the Russian military.

Since the beginning of March, we have evacuated staff of foreign companies with offices in Ukraine, as well as private families. We have facilitated the purchase and delivery of close to £1 million of essential aid to frontline troops and hospitals, secured contracts with the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence to provide training and advisory services, and are providing close protection and safety advisory services to media and NGO clients. We have also partnered with two organisations to provide investigation services into human trafficking and war crimes. 

Author

DAN KAINE is a Senior Partner of Risk and Crisis Advisory at Inherent Risks. He has operated at military, government and corporate levels, including tenures in Latin America, West and East Africa and the Middle East, and has led the rapid response to major incidents around the world involving business and leisure travellers, including political unrest, terrorist attacks and natural hazards

Ukrainian Refugees in freezing temperatures at the Medyka Border Crossing Point, awaiting transport to take them to safety
Photo: Dan Kaine

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