

UKRAINE

Conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk

Since 2014, persisting armed conflict between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces (*oblasts*) in eastern Ukraine has caused over 3,000 civilian deaths, some 9,000 casualties, and internally displaced about 1.3 million people. Currently an estimated 5.2 million are affected by the conflict in eastern Ukraine, in particular people living within 20km on each side of the contact line that divides government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government-controlled areas (NGCA).

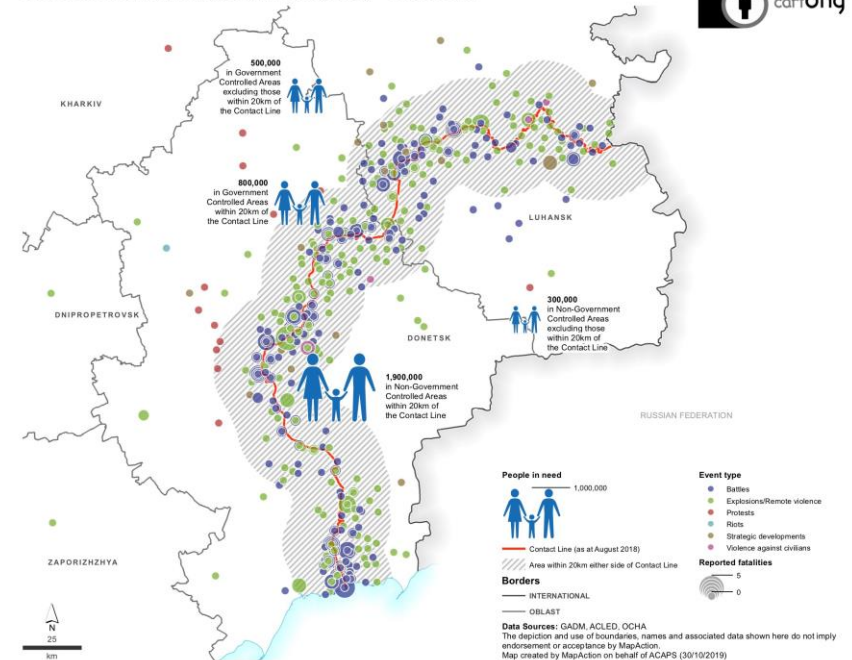
NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



IMPACT



East Ukraine: People in need and security events (January – October 2019)



Anticipated scope and scale

Despite ceasefire agreements (the latest one in late July 2019) and a significant reduction in violence against civilians since 2016, continued attacks against water and electric infrastructure keep disrupting service provision. Insecurity and restrictions on movement are likely to continue, affecting access to food and basic services (health, education) and limiting livelihood opportunities.

Humanitarian conditions are expected to deteriorate in the winter months, when the increased utility prices will force many of the most vulnerable households to spend less on food and reduce their consumption.

Key priorities



3.2 million
in need of WASH assistance



Livelihoods support
during the winter months



Protection needs
heightened along the contact line

Humanitarian constraints



Despite a decrease in hostilities, insecurity and the presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war represent major access constraints. People in non-government-controlled areas are particularly hard to reach due to logistical constraints and administrative requirements imposed by separatist authorities.

Limitations

Operational presence in NGCA is extremely low, and information on humanitarian needs is lacking.

Overview of the crisis

History of the conflict

The current conflict in eastern Ukraine began in November 2013, when then President Viktor Yanukovich rejected the Association Agreement with the EU, part of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, allowing for a stronger economic integration with the European Union. His decision sparked months of pro-European protests in the capital Kyiv and across the country. The protests were referred to as Euromaidan, after the central square in Kyiv, Maidan Nezalezhnosti where the bulk of the protests took place. Protests were violently repressed by government authorities (OHCHR 15/05/2014, Humanitarian Policy Group 2017, NPR 22/02/2014). An agreement to settle the political crisis in Ukraine was ultimately signed on 21 February 2014 by President Yanukovich and the leaders of parliamentary opposition. Among other things, signatories to the agreement agreed to restore the 2004 Constitution, the formation of a national unity government, and investigation into recent acts of violence. Representatives from the German, Polish, French, and Russian governments were present as witnesses. Shortly after, Yanukovich fled the country. From Moscow's perspective, the signing of the agreement signalled Ukraine's will for long-term integration with the EU, which was viewed as a threat to Russian interests in Ukraine and incompatible with Putin's plan to create a "Eurasian Union" (Carnegie Moscow Center 02/03/2014, The Atlantic 02/03/2014, The Guardian 22/02/2014; 21/02/2014).

In the autonomous Crimea region of Ukraine, where 60% of the population are ethnic Russians, the removal of Yanukovich sparked protests against the new interim government (Kyiv Post 02/03/2014, The Atlantic 02/03/2014). In March 2014, and in direct response to the Euromaidan, Russia annexed Crimea, invoking the necessity to protect the rights of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking Crimeans against Ukraine and the EU. The annexation was approved through a highly contested referendum garnering 97% votes in favour according to the organisers (a special committee set up by the authorities of Crimea), but was not recognised by the international community or the Ukrainian government (Humanitarian Policy Group 2017, New York Times 16/03/2014, Washington Post 18/03/2014).

In April 2014, pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine declared the independence of the People's Republic of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Referendums were held in both regions, with over 90% votes in favour of independence from Ukraine, according to separatist leaders. The process was marred with irregularities and suspicions of electoral fraud and was subsequently deemed illegitimate by the international community. By mid-April, separatists had taken over the main administrative buildings

in Donetsk and Luhansk. The Ukrainian government responded with the deployment of troops to counter the spread of separatist forces, established checkpoints, and imposed controls on the movement of goods and people. Since then, government forces and pro-Russian separatists have been fighting in Donetsk and Luhansk, which are now divided along the contact line between government-controlled areas (GCAs) and non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs). Over 3,000 civilians have died and some 9,000 have been injured since the conflict began in 2014. Over 480,000 people have fled the country, and 1.3 million are internally displaced (SWP 04/2019, NRC 31/01/2019, IOM 03/2019, OHCHR 15/06/2014, Kyiv Post 14/04/2014, BBC 07/04/2014).

The crisis further escalated in July 2014, when a Malaysian Airlines plane was shot down over Ukrainian airspace. While Russian president Putin had denied involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, the EU, United States, and NATO took the incident as confirmation of Russia's involvement in the conflict, prompting them to impose sanctions on Russia. An investigation later concluded that the plane had been hit by a Russian missile. In August 2014, the Russian military ramped up its support to separatist forces that were experiencing setbacks in their fight against the Ukrainian government (Donbas SOS 18/09/2019, New York Times 14/10/2015).

In September 2014, representatives from the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine (composed of Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) drafted a peace plan referred to as the Minsk Protocol. Despite the declaration of a ceasefire, fighting continued. By January 2015, the protocol had fallen through after the Ukrainian government forces lost control of Donetsk airport, and Russia and Ukraine agreed to move artillery back from the front line (The Guardian 21/01/2015, Vox Ukraine 17/10/2014, OSCE 02/09/2014).

A new attempt at peace negotiations was organised between Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany in February 2015. Among other measures, the Minsk Accords (Minsk II) included provisions for a ceasefire, withdrawal of armed groups (both secessionists and "mercenary" groups made up of foreign nationals), and removal of heavy weapons from the contact line. In addition, in order to discourage any potential Russian aggression in the region, NATO announced the deployment of four battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland (Donbas SOS 18/09/2019, Reuters 05/06/2018, BBC 12/02/2015).

Minsk II contributed to deescalate hostilities but did not completely stop the fighting. January 2018 saw persisting shelling and attacks along the contact line and surrounding areas. Despite this, Ukraine in 2018 saw an 85.7% reduction in deaths due to internal conflict (Donbas SOS 18/09/2019, Euromaiden Press 04/06/2019, Global Peace Index 2019, Crisis Group 15/12/2017).

Recent developments

21 April 2019: Victory of comedian Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine's presidential elections with over 73% of the votes. While fundamental freedoms were respected during the election process, evidence of vote-buying and misuse of state resources undermined the fairness of the process. Zelensky was a supporter of the Euromaidan movement in 2013 and 2014, and his party "Servant of the People" has chosen libertarianism as its core ideology. There is little clarity regarding his objectives; however, he is eager to find a resolution to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and facilitate the reintegration of NGCA (The Economist 26/09/2019, Atlantic Council 10/09/2019, BBC 22/04/2019, OSCE 01/04/2019).

17 July 2019: Following a rise in violence in the beginning of July, the Trilateral Contact Group (composed of Ukraine, Russia, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and representatives from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts announce a ceasefire implemented on 21 July. One of the objectives of the ceasefire is to facilitate the reconstruction of the pedestrian bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoint that was destroyed in 2015, situated in a very insecure area and crucial for the movement of civilians, as well as humanitarian access (OSCE 17/07/2019).

7 September 2019: In a symbolic step towards opening a dialogue, Ukraine and Russia exchange 25 prisoners each. However, the security situation remains volatile, with many ceasefire violations recorded daily (UNICEF 30/09/2019, Crisis Group 11/09/2019).

1 October 2019: Ukrainian president Zelensky announces that his government has signed the Steinmeier Formula, a simplified version of the Minsk agreements proposed in 2016 by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's foreign minister at the time. The Steinmeier Formula calls for local elections to be held in NGCA under Ukrainian law, provided that "all foreign armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries" withdraw from Donetsk and Luhansk, and the Ukrainian government regains control of NGCA. It would also grant special status for the contested territories. The signature leads to protests in Kyiv. The Formula is wildly unpopular in Ukraine, seen as a capitulation, and a way to let Russia win (The Conversation 14/10/2019, Crisis Group 09/10/2019, Euractiv 07/10/2019, Atlantic Council 04/10/2019, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty 02/10/2019).

7 October 2019: Zelensky issues a decree to restore the destroyed pedestrian bridge over the Siverskyi Donets River in Stanytsia Luhanska by 27 November. Located at a strategic checkpoint between GCA and NGCA, the bridge is one of four operational crossing points and quite important for the free movement of people (Kyiv Post 07/10/2019).

Crisis impact

WASH: Across Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, around 3.2 million people are in need of WASH assistance. Access to safe water and adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities is one of the most pressing challenges faced by people living in GCA and NGCA.

The current situation is compounded by pre-existing vulnerabilities specific to the two oblasts. Prior to the conflict, part of the water and sanitation infrastructure was obsolete or in urgent need of repairs. In addition, the region was receiving less funds to maintain functioning systems compared to other regions in the country. Since the conflict began in 2014, at least 369 incidents affecting WASH service provision and infrastructure (water pumps, pipelines, treatment facilities, etc.) have been recorded. Despite the conflict having decreased in intensity, 77 incidents were recorded between January and September 2019, a 13% increase from the 68 incidents recorded during the comparable period of 2018. Recurrent power shortages caused by the shelling of electrical systems have damaged water pumps and led to major dysfunctions in water provision.

The most significant incident in 2019 occurred on 29 July, when bomb fragments from an explosion damaged water pipelines – responsible for supplying over three million people on both sides of the contact line – near Horlivka (UNICEF 30/09/2019; 21/03/2019, CNN 03/07/2019). As a direct result of the conflict, government funds allocated to maintaining and repairing damaged WASH infrastructure have decreased. Moreover, repairs are not always possible due to access constraints.

The presence of armed groups, landmines, and IEDs, coupled with the poor condition of the road network in some areas prevents both well access and water trucking. In NGCAs, conflict-affected populations face additional challenges linked to restrictions of freedom of movement and supply of goods, as water delivery is rationed and follows a strict schedule. Water unavailability has a significant impact on the quality of life of elderly people and children, who have an immune status that is more susceptible to contracting waterborne diseases, and people with chronic illnesses for whom drinking unsafe water might worsen their condition (CNN 03/07/2019, UNICEF 21/03/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

Many people have resorted to drinking poor quality water because of water scarcity. According to an assessment by REACH Initiative conducted in September 2017 in settlements 5km from the line of contact in the GCA of Donetsk and Luhansk, 34% of surveyed households reported drinking untreated water. The situation was worse for rural households, who were more likely to rely on groundwater from boreholes and tube wells as their drinking water source. An assessment from Caritas conducted between December 2018 and March 2019 in 44 settlements in the buffer zone of Donetsk and Luhansk (15km on each side) found 79% of respondents reporting that they consumed

poor quality water. Only 11% were satisfied with the quality of the water they drank. The situation is particularly worrying in Volnovakha and Popasna regions. In the city of Popasna (pop. 20,000), 70% of households did not have access to tap water at the time of the assessment (during the winter months, between December 2018 and March 2019).

Access to some water treatment products such as chlorine gas is becoming increasingly difficult, and most people do not have the resources to carry out quality control on the water they consume. The cost of chlorine gas, for instance, tripled in 2018. Further, analysis of water sources revealed that polluted water caused by industrial waste products was found up to 42 metres in the ground in Donetsk, and 60 metres in Luhansk (Caritas International 22/03/2019, REACH Initiative 28/02/2018).

Regarding sanitation and hygiene facilities, 60% of the people surveyed by Caritas relied on pit latrines for drainage, 46% used outside toilets, and only 22% had stable waste disposal services. About 46% used outside toilets, most in rural locations (Caritas International 22/03/2019).

Although epidemiological data is lacking (especially in NGCA), the combination of the deterioration of WASH infrastructure, poor quality water, and low immunisation rates in affected areas is likely to lead to outbreaks of communicable diseases. The risk of diseases is particularly worrying for children under 15, who, according to a UNICEF report looking at mortality rates in 16 countries with protracted conflict, are three times more likely to die of diseases caused by poor water and sanitation than by violence from the conflict (REACH Initiative 28/02/2018, UNICEF 21/03/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

Food security and livelihoods: The conflict has paralysed the economies of Luhansk and Donetsk and resulted in increased unemployment rates (now highest in the country), loss of income, and depletion of livelihood opportunities. Widespread mine contamination has severely reduced rural households' access to agricultural fields. IDPs face additional challenges due to unemployment or lack of access to social benefits such as pensions, that they were entitled to before the conflict started (UNHCR 08/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

The September 2017 assessment from REACH found the number of households with poor or borderline food consumption scores increased by 61% between the summer and winter seasons. The situation was particularly worrying in rural areas, where surveyed households spent around 20% of their income on utilities during the winter and had to reduce their food consumption. In 2018, many respondents reported having reduced the quantity and variety of fruits and vegetables they consumed. Single-headed households, female-headed households, and households headed by pre-pensioners were found particularly at risk of food insecurity (OCHA 20/09/2019, REACH Initiative 28/02/2018).

Prices of foods usually increase before winter months, which will likely decrease their availability before the winter months (OCHA 20/09/2019).

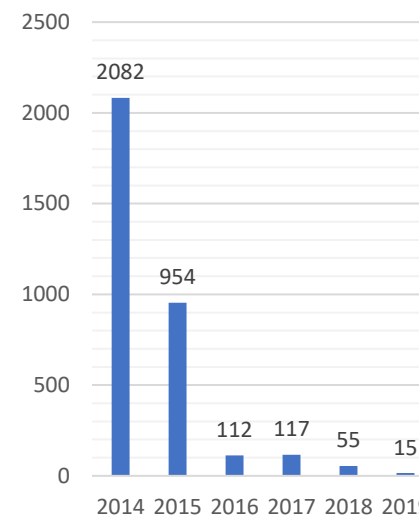
Protection: Since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, over 3,000 civilians are estimated to have died, and 9,000 have been injured. In 2017 and 2018, 40% of casualties were attributed ERW and anti-vehicle mine incidents. While fighting has persisted over the years, the number of civilian victims has drastically reduced, reflecting a shift in shelling patterns, with attacks focusing on military targets outside of populated areas (UNICEF 05/2018, OCHA 31/01/2019). In the first nine months of 2019, a total of 109 civilian casualties was recorded (15 dead and 94 injured). This represents the lowest number of civilian casualties since 2014 (Protection Cluster 30/09/2019, OHCHR 23/05/2019).

Although shelling poses less of a threat five years into the conflict, landmines and IEDs are still a major concern, with an estimated two million people exposed in GCA. Data in NGCA is lacking; however, it can be assumed that the situation is similarly severe, especially in areas along the contact line (OCHA 31/01/2019).

People living on both sides of the contact line are experiencing restrictions on their freedom of movement. In 2017 and 2018, checkpoints on the contact line registered on average 1.1 million crossing per month. According to the EECF survey (Entry-exit checkpoints survey, conducted in the first half of 2019), the majority (46%) of people crossing from NGCA into GCA cite reasons related to pensions and social payments. Out of those, 91% are aged 60 and over, and the government requires them to register as IDPs in GCA in order to receive their pensions. At checkpoints, people often have to wait hours before crossing, exposing them to dangers related to the conflict as well as extreme temperatures in the winter, and sun during the summer. Older people crossing the contact line are particularly at risk (Right to Protection 04/10/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

Issues related to the lack of civil documentation are particularly prevalent in NGCA. Legislative documents issued by the separatist authorities in NGCA (including birth certificates, IDs, diplomas, etc.) are deemed illegitimate and are not recognised by the Ukrainian government. The lack of civil recognition leads to severe protection risks. An

Conflict-related civilian fatalities (2014 - 2019)



Protection Cluster 30/09/2019, OHCHR 23/05/2019

estimated 57% of births in NGCA are unregistered, meaning there is a serious risk of statelessness (Right to Protection 04/10/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

Health: The risk of communicable disease outbreaks is heightened by frequent water shortages – leading to increased reliance on unsafe water – and low immunisation rates. Ukraine has had recent outbreaks of polio (two cases in 2017, caused by one very low vaccination rates of 51.9%), measles (over 100,000 cases and 39 deaths since mid-2017), and some cases of tetanus and diphtheria. A potential outbreak of tuberculosis, endemic in Ukraine, is a concern. In addition, HIV rates in Donetsk and Luhansk are among the highest in Ukraine. Displacement, a malfunctioning health system, and lack of appropriate treatment and testing means that risks of HIV contagion are heightened. Overall, there is a lack of epidemiological reporting in NGCA, which limits analysis of the true extent of health needs (Reuters 03/10/2019, UNHCR 20/09/2019, The New Humanitarian 24/06/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

Many health centres are not functioning properly due to power shortages and disruptions of water systems, and many health professionals have fled. While both sides of the contact line have experienced a spike in the cost of healthcare and decreased availability of medicines and medical equipment, access to healthcare is particularly challenging in NGCA. Residents are isolated from the main health centres in GCA, and have limited access to medicine, vaccination, and HIV testing (IOM 03/2019, UNICEF 05/2018).

The psychosocial impact of the crisis is considerable. Psychosocial distress is caused by a range of factors including fear of shelling and landmines, family separation, limited access to basic services, and stress related to unemployment and loss of livelihoods. People suffering from chronic mental health disorders are particularly vulnerable during conflict and require urgent psychological assistance. Most families living in conflict zones in GCA reported that psychosocial support services were either unavailable or difficult to access. Although data for NGCA is lacking, it can be assumed that psychosocial support is also urgently needed (OCHA 31/01/2019).

Displacement: Around 1.3 million people were internally displaced as of March 2019; of these, 60% originated from Donetsk oblast, and 37% from Luhansk oblast. Several waves of displacement have occurred since the beginning of the conflict, with people primarily being displaced within Donetsk (486,336 IDPs) and Luhansk (270,047 IDPs) oblasts, half of them beyond the 20km area around the contact line. Other host regions include Kyiv city and oblast (201,512), Kharkiv oblast (128,231), Dnipropetrovsk oblast (68,271) and Zaporizhia oblast (54,199). Areas welcoming IDPs initially faced several challenges related to the provision of accommodations and services; however, local authorities have played an important role in providing emergency accommodation and temporary shelter to newly displaced populations (Right to Protection 21/10/2019, IOM 03/2019).



Source: The New Humanitarian 10/09/2019

The crisis in eastern Ukraine is gradually resulting in a situation of protracted displacement. According to the latest DTM round conducted by IOM in March 2019, 73% of surveyed IDPs declared they had been staying at their place of displacement for over three years. 34% had no intention of returning to their place of origin, even after the end of the conflict. Only 20% had returned to NGCA. These returns were by necessity, primarily motivated by the ownership of private property, and inability to pay rent in their places of displacement (IOM 03/2019).

IDPs face major challenges related to housing costs, with many having to stay in rented accommodation. When trying to rent, some IDPs report discrimination (because of their region of origin, disability, number of children). Only half of people surveyed during the DTM exercise reported feeling integrated within the community. Unemployment rates in Donetsk and Luhansk are similar for IDPs (45%) and the rest of the population (43%). However, the average monthly income per IDP household is significantly lower than the national average (UAH 2,667 as opposed to UAH 4,696), and largely below the subsistence level of UAH 3,586 calculated by the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy (The New Humanitarian 10/09/2019, IOM 03/2019, State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2019).

Education: Insecurity has severely disrupted access to education. The presence of landmines and ERW prevents children from attending school. Since the beginning of the conflict, over 750 schools both in NGCA and GCA were damaged; 78% of these are located less than 5km from the contact line. An estimated 700,000 students and teachers have been affected by these disruptions: 32 attacks against education facilities were recorded during the first nine months of 2019, twice as many as the whole of 2018. Many schools in Ukraine are not equipped with bomb shelters to withstand shelling and shootings, and children have taken refuge in school basements, leaving them particularly exposed during an attack (Global Education Cluster 04/10/2019, UNICEF 30/09/2019; 20/05/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019).

The repeated attacks and disruption of education will have a long-term impact on children in terms of learning, and also trauma. Teachers are affected either directly, or through “secondary trauma”, often playing the role of first responders. Many teachers have fled to other parts of the country, and those remaining lack training and educational material to be able to teach in the most optimal conditions (Global Education Cluster 01/10/2019, UNICEF 05/2018).

In 2019, an estimated 10% of the 20,000 high school graduates have enrolled in higher education programmes. Legal documents issued by NGCA authorities are not recognised by Ukrainian authorities, and registration is very complicated. As the crisis persists, the number of students with no officially recognised diplomas is rising, and will likely lead to fewer opportunities to receive a tertiary education, and increased difficulty entering the job market (Global Education Cluster 01/10/2019, OCHA 20/09/2019).

Shelter: As of February 2019, an estimated 50,000 civilian homes have been damaged since the conflict began, and another 40,000 are in need of urgent repair. Most of the damage to civilian buildings occurred between 2014 and 2015, the most intense fighting period. These estimates do not take into account potential destruction in non-accessible areas, and the number of damaged houses is likely higher. Many people whose property was damaged during the conflict have yet to receive compensation from the government. While there is in theory a three-year window for victims to apply for war damage compensation, the conflict effectively paralysed the legal system, making it difficult for the administrative authorities to deal with compensation claims (Donbas SOS 18/09/2019, Open Democracy 23/05/2019).

According to the March 2019 DTM round, 62% of surveyed IDPs across the country were housed in rented accommodations, and 13% stayed with relatives or host families. Displaced households frequently cite the high price of housing as a major difficulty (IOM 03/2019).

Impact on critical infrastructure

Basic service provision in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts has been severely disrupted by persistent attacks on health, education, water, electricity, and heating infrastructure. Over 300 incidents damaging water and sanitation facilities have occurred since 2014 (UNICEF 19/09/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019). Health facilities in both GCA and NGCA are dealing with limited availability of ambulances, damaged health infrastructure, and a shortage of medical staff (many have fled conflict-affected areas).

Currently no estimates are available on the overall damage caused by the conflict in terms of economic losses up to 2019. After the fighting in March 2015 which caused most of the destruction, the World Bank estimated economic losses at EUR 463 million. This estimate most likely understates the scale of actual economic losses. During the 2019 Ukraine Reform Conference in Toronto, President Zelensky declared that according to government estimates, over EUR 10 billion would be required to rebuild the country (New Eastern Europe 24/09/2019).

Several major cyberattacks have targeted Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. These resulted in power cuts impacting the entire country, including Donetsk and Luhansk. The worst attack occurred in 2017, when a malware dubbed “NotPetya” provoked major power cuts. The damage caused by the virus amounted to about USD 10 billion. Cyberattacks are attributed to Russian security services, attempting to cause expensive disruptions and sabotage national infrastructure (Politico 14/02/2019, New York Times 15/02/2018, Reuters 29/12/2016, BBC 26/02/2016).

Vulnerable groups affected

People over the age of 60 account for 30% of the people in need. As a comparison, people over 60 made up 22.5% of the demographics of the country in 2016. Older people present higher rates of disability, are more likely to be separated from their families, and are highly susceptible to economic insecurity. In Ukraine, many elderly people face great difficulties in accessing social benefits. In particular, the government requires pensioners living in NGCA to register as IDPs in GCAs and provide addresses in government-controlled areas in order to receive their pensions. Retirement age in Ukraine varies from 60 to 65 years old, depending on the type of work. The practice has been described as discriminatory by Human Rights Watch and puts elderly people in a vulnerable situation. Once every 60 days, they are forced to travel through Ukrainian crossing points, which can be tedious as well as dangerous. The government refuses to pay their pension if they do not comply with this requirement. Many rely on pensions to survive, yet as of December 2018, only 562,000 pensioners out of the 1.2 million registered in NGCA were receiving their pensions (Kyiv Post 14/08/2019, Human Rights Watch

10/07/2019, OHCHR 23/05/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019, REACH Initiative 28/02/2018, State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2016).

Ukraine is a country of origin, transit, and destination for human trafficking. According to IOM, over 230,000 Ukrainians have become **victims of human trafficking** since 1991. The conflict exacerbates the risks of human trafficking, especially for women and girls who are reported to be recruited for sex labour trafficking. Ukrainian children are also at risk of being subjected to forced begging, sex, and labour trafficking. A 2019 IOM survey of over 2,000 vulnerable youths in the country found that 40% declared being ready to accept at least one offer that may lead to their involvement in human trafficking. In NGCA, there are reports of children being used as soldiers, human shields, informants, and checkpoint guards by armed secessionists. In conflict areas, there have been reports of adolescents and young men pressured or forced to fight against Ukraine in the East. Men are recruited for forced labour in different sectors including construction, agriculture, manufacturing, lumber industry, etc. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Ukrainians have ended up in prisons in Russia since 2015 on drug charges, after having been promised legal employment as couriers. The majority of forced disappearances have been attributed to separatists forces in NGCA (IOM accessed 25/10/2019, Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group 17/09/2019, US Department of State 06/2019, IOM 2019, Inter Press Service 22/05/2018, DW 18/05/2016).

Over 242,000 children and teachers are commuting daily along the contact line to attend school. They face heightened risk of shelling of landmines (OCHA 31/01/2019).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Ongoing insecurity affecting people in need: Risks of shelling, the presence of landmines, and ERW severely restrict movement, especially near the contact line. People often have to cover long distances to access health facilities, especially those living in proximity to the contact line. Shelling near critical humanitarian corridors such as the Donetsk Markina Checkpoint also limits humanitarian access (Protection Cluster 07/2019, Humanitarian Policy Group 2018).

Restriction and obstruction of access to services and assistance: Early on, pro-government militias (including Dnipro-1 and Aidar) were blocking humanitarian aid to prevent it from reaching NGCA. In 2017 Kyiv implemented an economic blockade on NGCA, which severely impacted on aid delivery and access, in addition to paralysing the local economy. Some organisations (local and international) have authorisations from separatist authorities to operate. However, for others, the decisions are still pending, and contact with authorities in NGCA is minimal (Crisis Group 13/05/2019, Amnesty International 24/12/2014).

Impediments to entry: Registration of humanitarian organisations is challenging due to the complexity of Ukrainian legislation, which initially framed the conflict as an anti-

terrorist operation. The definition has expanded since April 2018, becoming a Joint Forces Operation and allowing a wider military operation and leadership. However, it has had little impact on humanitarian access. As a result, entry and accreditation procedures are long, and require dealing with both Ukrainian and separatist authorities. UN and NGOs are consistently advocating for better humanitarian access, through forums for example (Right to Protection 23/05/2019).

Restriction of movement: There are five operating exit-entry checkpoints along the contact line. People often have to wait hours at checkpoints to travel between GCA and NGCA, putting vulnerable people (e.g., sick, elderly) particularly at risk. Over January-May 2019, long waiting times and poor conditions at checkpoints resulted in 25 civilian deaths, most from health complications while waiting to cross the contact line. In addition, depending on the location and the intensity of fighting, checkpoints have had to close sometimes for days at a time. This further restricts the free movement of people and humanitarian organisations across the contact line (USAID 24/06/2019, OCHA 07/05/2019).

Humanitarian space in eastern Ukraine has decreased over the five years of conflict.

Aggravating factors

Extreme winter conditions

Ukraine experiences extreme weather conditions during winters, lasting from November to March, with temperatures dropping as low as -20 degree Celsius. The impact of the conflict is felt even more during winter months, and humanitarian needs are exacerbated due to freezing temperatures, frequent stoppages of water, gas, and electricity, and decrease in food availability. According to results of an assessment conducted by REACH Initiative in February 2018, 74% of households surveyed in Donetsk and Luhansk experienced more health problems. Access to healthcare was more difficult during winter for 40% of households (51% in rural areas), often because of the long distances to access health facilities. In addition, households are most likely to spend more money in winter, when utility expenses (electricity, water, heating, etc.) constitute around 30% of their monthly expenditure. As a consequence, households are likely to reduce their food consumption so they can pay for these other expenses. The situation is likely to be particularly dire in NGCA in Donetsk during winter 2019, given authorities announced on 30 August an increase in utility bills such as disposal costs (30% increase), cold water supply (57%), and sewerage (57%) (OCHA 20/09/2019, UNHCR 08/2019, OCHA 31/01/2019, REACH Initiative 28/02/2018,)

Economic deterioration

Historically peripheral and scarcely populated regions, Donetsk and Luhansk gained prominence in the late 19th and 20th century during the industrialisation of Ukraine, due to their natural resources. In 2014, the two regions were responsible for most of coal mining and steel production in the country, accounting for 16% of the country's GDP. By the summer of 2014, the economic output of Donetsk and Luhansk had decreased by 70% and has continued to lose a significant net share of its industrial output, impacting the country as a whole (New Eastern Europe 24/09/2019, German Advisory Group 06/2014, SBS News 05/03/2014).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The Government of Ukraine is able to respond in GCA, but access to populations in NGCA is more challenging. The country has no previous experience in dealing with a large-scale humanitarian emergency, and there are a lot of bureaucratic, logistical, and legal hurdles humanitarians are facing to set up their operations (Humanitarian Policy Group 2018).

In NGCA, local authorities have set up an accreditation system that makes it difficult for international organisation to operate. Assistance in those areas is therefore sometimes handled by local organisations, however, they sometimes also have trouble obtaining permission from the separatist authorities (Humanitarian Policy Group 2018).

International response capacity

As humanitarian access remains severely constrained, international actors are mostly operating in GCA, and there is an extremely limited number of operational agencies and humanitarian activities in NGCA. Still, a few UN agencies and INGOs have set up offices and are allowed to operate (OCHA 06/09/2019).

As of September 2019, only 36% of the 2019 humanitarian appeal requirement was met (USD 7.8 million out of USD 21 million required), negatively impacting international's actors' ability to respond and address major humanitarian needs across all sectors. Funding gaps in 2017 and 2018 have heavily impacted the humanitarian response. At least six humanitarian organisations were forced to stop their operations in Ukraine (UNICEF 30/09/2019, OCHA 20/09/2019).

Information gaps and needs

- Absence of relevant data on the direct impact of water quality on people's health.
- Lack of epidemiological reporting in NGCA limits analysis of the health needs.
- No established Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in Ukraine.



East Ukraine: People in need and security events (January – October 2019)

