

Humanitarian Challenges



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Background

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 was followed a month later by an outbreak of fighting in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region between armed separatists backed by Russia and Ukrainian armed forces. Fierce fighting there triggered Europe's largest internal migration crisis since World War II. Today, more than 1.8 million Ukrainians have registered with their government as internally displaced persons (IDPs).

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Another 1.4 million Ukrainians have fled abroad using various legal avenues to get residency, mostly to Russia (1.1 million), while others sought refugee status

in neighboring countries or Europe. The top receiving countries for Ukrainian asylum seekers in Europe were Germany, Italy, Poland, France, and Sweden.¹ The Donbas area they fled was producing 15% of the country's exports. Now parts of Luhansk and Donetsk are controlled by separatists supported by Russian aid, weaponry, advisors, and “volunteer” fighters. The separatists control over 2.5 million Ukrainians, living under conditions of lawlessness, human rights abuse, limited markets, poor economic conditions, and faltering public institutions.²

Ukraine was militarily and domestically ill-prepared to deal with the security and humanitarian challenges that Crimea's annexation and the armed insurrection of the Russian-backed separatist unleashed. As hundreds of thousands fled the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, the government relied on volunteers both to aid its defense and to cope with emergency humanitarian needs and evacuation of civilians, “internal refugees” from the conflict. Citizens who flee violence but remain with-

¹ UNHCR Operational Update, June 2016 (2).

² “Ukraine,” Human Rights Watch, hrw.org/europe/central-asia/ukraine.

in their country of residence or nationality are called internally displaced persons (IDPs) and remain the responsibility of their government. As the numbers of displaced populations skyrocketed, the Government of Ukraine (GOU) requested humanitarian assistance from the United Nations. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) deployed staff and, working with the GOU and the UN country team, issued an emergency appeal in August for \$33.3 million to improve protection and assistance for those most at risk among the 5 million affected by the conflict. OCHA and UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing nongovernmental partners continue working with the government, local communities to improve the protection of the rights of displaced and war-affected people and enhance their ability to meet their basic needs.

Today's Humanitarian Challenges in Ukraine

“We feel abandoned, forgotten by all,” said a group of IDPs living in the 15 kilometer buffer zone along the line separating Ukrainian and separatist forces.³ Life is grim on both sides of the line, with access and travel in these communities limited, due to insecurity, checkpoints, road closures and the presence of landmines and other unexploded remnants of war. Public transport in even the Ukrainian controlled zone is practically nonexistent, as are ambulances, fire services, police, or the rule of law. One hundred and twenty health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, only a few have been repaired. Yet many have no choice but to remain in these war affected areas. The UN requested \$298 million for 2016 to provide for protection and basic needs of 2.5 million of the 3.1 million still in need of humanitarian aid. The appeal for Ukraine is a small part of the \$21 billion the UN must raise to respond to the need of the world’s 65 million conflict victims, refugees, and displaced persons as well as 26 million others at risk due to famine and natural disasters.⁴

3 Author interviews with IDPs and war-affected villagers, Ukraine gray zone, July 2015.

4 OCHA 2016 Appeal, [reliefweb.int/report/world/un-and-partners-launch-](http://reliefweb.int/report/world/un-and-partners-launch-2016-humanitarian-appeal-asking-201-billion-aiming-reach-over-87)

Health and Nutrition

In Ukraine 2.3 million citizens need international support to remain healthy, to access medicine and adequate nutrition. Ukrainian clinics and hospitals need international aid to fight infectious disease, like polio (now contained), TB, and HIV or to treat chronic conditions like kidney disease, hypertension, and mental and physical disabilities. Residents of separatist areas too often lack access to affordable medicines, treatments, and nutritious food. This year, the UN requested \$33.3 million for health and nutrition, but only \$3.3 million has been donated. The World Health Organization (WHO) is working to increase the country’s low vaccination coverage and preventive health service, but poor funding may cause the cancellation of its 30 mobile health units, which serve 12,000 people a month.⁵ Schools and kindergartens have been damaged. Teachers, parents and students need psycho-social support; many teachers and experienced civil servants have fled the conflict areas.

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800,000 residents remain in buffer zone communities, despite insecurity and absent services and amenities. Some residents are still employed, but struggle to survive, while others must rely on friends or charity; many are elderly or disabled, often lacking the resources, energy, or possibilities to relocate.

Humanitarian conditions in the separatist-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk are worse. Separatist authorities continue to restrict UN and NGO human-

2016-humanitarian-appeal-asking-201-billion-aiming-reach-over-87

5 Humanitarian Response Plan Ukraine 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2016-humanitarian-response-plan-january-december-2016-enuk>; WHO // www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/emergencies/disaster-preparedness-and-response/news/news/2016/07/who-delivers-58-tons-of-supplies-to-eastern-ukraine and UNICEF Humanitarian Report, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-situation-report-46-1-31-may-2016

itarian access and program operations. In the summer of 2015, the separatist authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk requested information about operations and registration from all humanitarian organizations to determine who might continue operations. They then rejected most applicants. Only a few NGOs and international organizations are permitted to operate monitoring or humanitarian aid programs for those most in need. In a surprising breakthrough, three UN humanitarian convoys of medicine and shelter materials were able to reach separatist occupied Luhansk in August.⁶

Hunger

The World Food Program (WFP) this year found that 500,000 IDPs and war-affected Ukrainians were facing malnutrition. More than half of those requiring food aid live in government-controlled regions including Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhya. The UN reported that the increase this year is due to higher prices, reduced incomes, the inability of many farmers, businesses, and families to access credit, and the depletion of family and local charitable resources after two years of war.⁷ Only \$20 million of the \$75 million needed for food security has been donated. WFP has issued an urgent appeal for more funding to provide food baskets, or where access to markets is feasible, vouchers or cash assistance to the malnourished until next January.

Land Mines

The UN is concerned that buffer zone residents and travelers will ignore or overlook warning signs marking the increasing number of landmines and unexploded ordnance near checkpoints, on roads, or at crossing points used each day by over 27,000 travelers.⁸ Increased fighting and new daytime shelling attacks produced the highest casualties this July (73 wounded and 8 deaths),⁹

bringing casualties since the start of the conflict to over 31,000 persons and deaths to 9,400.¹⁰ Increasing attacks since May 2016 have stopped residents near the conflict from tilling their fields, tending vegetable gardens, or gathering wood for cooking and heating.

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The OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) reports that hundreds of incidents of rockets, artillery and other heavy weapons are being fired each week from weapons that the latest ceasefire agreements required to be withdrawn from the front lines.¹¹ Some experts estimate that each year of war will require 10 years of clean up — large areas of eastern Ukraine now are contaminated with mines and unexploded remnants of war. Regrettably, according to observers, the government of Ukraine still lacks the modern machinery, vehicles, personal protective equipment, and sufficient tools to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance which have injured numerous civilians and pose a special risk to children.¹²

Employment

IDPs want to work to support their families but must contend with a depressed economy, inflation, high unemployment, reduced factory production and layoffs, as well as lack of contacts and knowledge of their

6 WHO, *ibid.*

7 “Ukraine” country brief, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/wfp-ukraine-country-brief-july-2016wfp

8 OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin 12, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/humanitarian-bulletin-ukraine-issue-12-1-31-july-2016, p 2.

9 OCHA op cit, page 1. Humanitarian Bulletin No.12,

10 UNHHR Casualties Report, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/eastern-ukraine-casualties-highest-august-2015-zeid-enruuk

11 OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine, report from 7 August 2016, www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/258221 OSCE.

12 OSCE Provides humanitarian demining equipment, osce.org/ukraine/133266.

host communities and sometimes outright discrimination. A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found employers thought IDPs only wanted temporary work or feared “they cannot offer adequate wages to entice and retain IDPs, who are often stretched financially and need significant funds to cover accommodation costs, including furnishing and equipping their new homes. Displaced women . . . have to look after their children, only part-time jobs or self-employment are generally feasible.”¹³ This same study found many IDPs well qualified: “More than half of the IDPs we surveyed have higher or incomplete higher education, so their labor and intellectual potential could significantly contribute to the country’s economic recovery.”¹⁴ Early recovery and livelihood activities planned by the UN have attracted less than \$2 million of the \$33 million requested. The GOU should encourage donors to support expanded retraining and small business development to enable more displaced families to become self-supporting.

IDP Benefits

With no jobs, most IDPs depend on benefit payments. Elderly IDPs receive both pensions and IDP benefits. The GOU created modest IDP benefits in 2015 for those living in government controlled areas. In February 2016 the GOU without notice cut off pension and IDP payments to over 500,000 IDPs, who it claims committed fraud by returning to live in separatist areas. Many IDPs and the organizations assisting them protested. Ukraine set up a re-verification exercise for IDP addresses that lacks sufficient staff to complete the process in 2016. The suspensions have overwhelmed local government offices and forced many IDPs, particularly the elderly, into extremely difficult situations, unable to pay rent, buy food or medicine, and dependent on charity. Under Ukrainian law, pensions can be paid anywhere. The GOU should disconnect pension payments from IDP benefits and permit its citizens to receive their earned pensions wherever they live.

13 IOM Survey Report, iom.int/news/survey-reveals-hurdles-integration-displaced-ukraine-iom.

14 *Ibid.*

Shelter

In the summer, some IDPs return to homes near the front lines, hoping to farm or cultivate gardens to improve their diets and their income. Others return to repair homes or apartments hoping security might improve and international shelter aid would permit them to complete repairs and permit them to live rent free in their own communities. To date, the GOU has failed to implement a legal basis and procedure to compensate or provide restitution to owners whose homes,

“The UN has urged that shelling of residential areas should cease to prevent more damaged homes, more civilian casualties and more displacement.

property, or businesses were damaged, destroyed, or confiscated in the conflict. This is a matter of great concern to the displaced who want recognition of their losses and some support to rebuild their lives. The UN has received only 20% of the \$56 million needed for shelter repairs and furnishings. Three hundred thousand families now are living in housing in need of repairs to make them habitable (windows, doors, roofs) and have water and heat. Ukraine supported the UN’s policy to avoid establishing large IDP camps, and instead encouraged people to find shelter and support with families and friends across the country. The UN has urged that shelling of residential areas should cease to prevent more damaged homes, more civilian casualties and more displacement. The UN found that 10,000 houses in Luhansk’s non-government controlled area (NGCA) are in urgent need of repair. Unexpectedly, in July the Luhansk separatists finally permitted the UN to deliver two convoys of shelter repair materials so repairs may begin before winter.¹⁵

15 UNHCR Steps Up Shelter Program, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/unhcr-steps-shelter-programme-eastern-ukraine.

Education

There are 580,000 children affected by the conflict in Ukraine. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) requested \$8.6 million and received \$2 million from donors. The Government of Ukraine permits displaced children and youth to enroll in Ukrainian government schools wherever they are living. Today, 220,000 children in the conflict area attend war-damaged schools. Many need tutoring to make up for lost schooling, and psychosocial support for themselves, as well as their parents and teachers. Some children were not enrolled in school because their parents expected to return home quickly, other children feared rejection or ridicule by teachers or host community students. Some families cannot pay school fees or give children pocket money. UNICEF has helped with school supplies, books, and Mine Risk Education. Dozens of children have been

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killed by mines and explosive remnants of war.¹⁶ The OSCE's chief monitor recently raised concerns that “the contamination of populated areas with explosive remnants of war, including across the contact line, in addition to restrictions of the freedom of movement at the checkpoints, directly affects children's access to education, health, recreation and social protection. Children in situations of internal displacement require special attention.”¹⁷ The needs of war-affected children and the need to expand kindergarten spaces so IDP mothers can seek work has put additional pressure on local educators and their budgets. UNICEF supports teacher training, Mine Risk Education, and awareness and support for child protection services. Its ability to work in the separatist areas has been limited. Ukrainian curriculum has been replaced under the separatists with Rus-

sian curriculum, which will complicate these children's access to Ukrainian education institutions.¹⁸

Water and Sanitation

UNICEF has received 11% of its requested budget of \$39 million to ensure water for 1.2 million Ukrainians and sanitary supplies to 300,000. To aid travellers, it now provides water and sanitary supplies for each side at border crossing points. By June, 1.4 million people had received drinking water, including 2,766 people in Donetsk, either through supplies of bottled water, water trucked to distribution points, or by repairing and rehabilitating war-damaged or aging water supply equipment and networks. The organization advocates for both sides to end attacks on water and electricity networks and systems which are essential for health. It has provided equipment and water purification chemicals to ensure safe drinking water for Luhansk NGCA residents and 20,000 hygiene kits for those unable to afford the cost of needed soap and cleaning supplies.¹⁹

Protection

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNICEF, and the UN Family Planning Association (UNFPA) work to improve legal and community protection for displaced and war-affected families, as well as vulnerable groups like children, the disabled, single heads of households, or minorities. The UN works with the GOU to educate about and encourage the adoption and implementation of international standards for dealing with the rights and needs of IDPs, asylum seekers, and refugees living in Ukraine. Respect for the international humanitarian principles of impartiality and non-discrimination and the protection of human life underpin the work of all genuine humanitarian efforts, despite the unpopularity of aiding those living under undemocratic and repressive systems, as occurring in the separatist areas. UNHCR advocates for restoration of freedom of movement and for improved humanitarian access to the most needy in both government and NGCA.

16 UNICEF Humanitarian Situation, reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-situation-report-47-june-2016

17 Ertugrul Apakan, OSCE Chief Monitor SMM to Ukraine, speaking on Children's Day, www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/244191

18 UNICEF June 16, *ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

UN protection programs educate and advocate with local authorities and communities on the rights of IDPs and the need for efforts to prevent and respond to gender based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Because of Ukraine's historic problems with human trafficking and response to trafficking victims, these agencies and their local implementing partners must educate war-affected families and local authorities about the need to prevent trafficking. The UN liaises with local government, supports NGO hot lines, outreach, information campaigns, counselling, and referrals, as well as legal aid services to the displaced. They partner with civil society groups to develop and update relevant information, such as this year's *Free Legal Aid Guide* or bulletins on how to obtain re-verification of residence to reinstate IDP benefits. Through education campaigns, awareness-raising, and social activities they help IDPs, host communities and local authorities better understand displacement, the legal rights and responsibilities of IDPs, and to foster greater acceptance and tolerance of differences, to promote reconciliation between different communities. Donors have provided \$15 million of the \$52 million the UN requested.²⁰

Freedom of Movement

Since late 2014, the GOU has required electronic passes for anyone seeking to enter or leave the separatist areas. It bans all commercial shipments, including food and medicine, into the NGCA. Despite restrictions limiting crossing points, permitting only private cars or taxis, and limiting travelers to 25 kg of cargo, over 800,000 Ukrainians crossed last year. They endure 10-12 hour queues at limited or often closed crossing points, extremes of hot and cold weather, shelling, requests for bribes, poor sanitation, little shelter, and at times no facilities. Ukrainians keep crossing because they want to visit and care for family and friends, to work, to access bank accounts, to shop for less expensive food and medicine, to inspect property, conduct business, or access once neighboring institutions like hospitals, churches, or cemeteries. Ukraine's constitution provides for freedom of movement, a right restricted since 2015, and these restrictions are heavily

disliked by citizens. Humanitarian agencies and the UN are also subject to restrictions on movements and cargo, and are permitted to use only specially designated convoy crossing points, which are often closed.

“Pensioners living in separatist areas must cross into GOU-controlled areas to access their pensions.”

Pensioners living in separatist areas must cross into GOU-controlled areas to access their pensions, which must be collected in person and only at Oschadbank.²¹

Creating Humane and Durable Solutions for the Displaced

While the search for a ceasefire and peace is a complex geopolitical problem, Ukraine's current displacement situation is fixable with a serious international and local effort. It needs to be accomplished before dissatisfaction and competition for scarce resources create major tensions or unrest. A report of the UN protection cluster in Ukraine found that “promotion of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, provision of basic services, and development of equal employment opportunities are all peacebuilding activities that can begin even as the conflict continues.”²²

In 2015, the World Bank, the EU, and the UN Development Program produced a reconstruction plan²³ that outlined how \$1.5 billion budget could expand social programs and carefully target projects with local government and businesses that would kickstart and

20 UNHCR Ukraine Operational Updates, unhcr.org.ua/en.

21 UNHCR Protection Cluster Suspension of social benefits. humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ukraine/document/update-suspension-social-benefits-and-pensions-idps

22 “UN Peacebuilding: an Orientation,” *ibid.* (6). reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/peacebuilding_reconciliation_guidance_note_0.pdf

23 European Union, United Nations, and World Bank Group, “Ukraine Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment: Analysis of Crisis Impacts and Needs in Eastern Ukraine,” vol. 2, March 2015 (105). www.un.org.ua/images/UkraineRecoveryPeace_A4_Vol2_Eng_rev4.pdf.

revive local economies, producing more tax revenues. The plan sought to promote the positive benefits of providing durable positive solutions for those displaced who are unable or unwilling to return to the East or to Crimea, due to the significant destruction and human rights abuses that have occurred. The plan will require national and local governments to work with international donors, financial institutions, private business, and industry to rebuild community cohesion and trust. The plan also calls for improved IDP and host community access to reliable public services, particularly social services (like health, welfare, education, kindergartens, employment services, etc.) and an increase in the stock of safe affordable housing to alleviate the pressing needs for shelter for the displaced. Meeting such needs would help to create jobs for IDPs and host community residents as they restore damaged infrastructure in secure areas and renovate or construct safe new housing. This should be possible because IDPs want to work and, according to a recent poll, they still are viewed favorably by their fellow countrymen and women.²⁴

The recent report *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation* found that a best practice for dealing successfully with those displaced is that “consistent and equitable provision of government services is a key component for promoting sustainable peace and social cohesion.”²⁵

Some regional and local officials are supportive, since employing IDPs and host community residents would promote economic and social integration and lessen competition and economic tensions. The new government ministry responsible for the occupied territories and IDPs, if adequately staffed, should plan coordinated efforts to end displacement and promote voluntary integration or reintegration of the displaced, with full restoration of their social, economic, and political rights.

Historically, most displacement lasts 17 years, a period that disrupts the social and economic fabric of a nation, isolates, disenfranchises, and wastes the potential

contributions of the displaced, while often breeding disaffection and mistrust and hampering a country’s economic and social development. Ukraine, with its educated population, healthy business sectors and a vibrant civil society and a renewed commitment to reduce corruption and economic and judicial reform should be able to plan and implement opportunities for its displaced citizens to return to more normal lives. Ukraine’s government and citizenry should encourage

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and welcome the displaced, who voted with their feet to remain Ukrainians. Ukraine’s political, business, religious, and civic leaders should press for policies and programs to solve internal displacement and to provide a legal basis for the restitution of property destroyed, damaged or confiscated during the war. Ukraine’s leaders should also make it possible for the war-displaced to integrate into communities they choose, where they will be welcomed, respected, and able to find jobs and housing to permit them to rebuild their lives and ensure a brighter future for themselves and for Ukraine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With 3.1 million conflict-affected people still in need and limited humanitarian funding, the U.S. should heed the UN Humanitarian Coordinator’s plea for more support, since “people in need as well as volunteers are traumatized, broke, and stretched to their limits.”²⁶

24 UNHCR and Kyiv Institute of Sociology, “After two years of displacement, hosting communities in Ukraine remain supportive towards IDPs - UNHCR study,” 9 June 2016.

25 “Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Ukraine,” Guidance Note, Protection Cluster, 2016. reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/peacebuilding_reconciliation_guidance_note_0.pdf.

26 Neal Walker, “Humanitarian Response Plan January-December 2016,” OCHA, p. 4

- 1. The U.S. should highlight, in all conversations with senior Ukrainian officials, humanitarian concerns**, including support for international humanitarian law and an end to Ukraine's commercial food and medical blockade of occupied territory.
- 2. The U.S. should provide increased funding for shelter and early recovery programs** in Ukraine and encourage other donors to do so.
- 3. The U.S. should provide seed funding to encourage Ukraine to develop and implement a coordinated plan to promote and bring about the successful reintegration of the displaced** and the return of their full political and economic rights.
- 4. The U.S. should provide development funds and encourage other donors to invest in housing, infrastructure repair, and job training in secure parts of Ukraine**, in order to create jobs and housing opportunities for displaced families.
- 5. The U.S. should encourage the government of Ukraine to separate all pension payments from IDP benefits**, and to establish clear rules

and procedures with a reasonable deadline for the completion of residence re-verifications, given the extreme poverty faced by most IDPs.

FURTHER READING

Record of the 7576th Meeting of the United Nations Security Council, on the situation in Ukraine, including briefings by Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson; Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Simonovic; Director of OCHA John Ging; and Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the OSCE. 11 December 2015.

Human Rights Watch 2016 report on Ukraine, accessible at hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/ukraine.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Torture and Secret Detention on Both Sides of the Conflict Line," EUR 50/4455, 21 July 2016. Full report accessible at amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/4455/2016/en/.