Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact

Situation Report No. 01

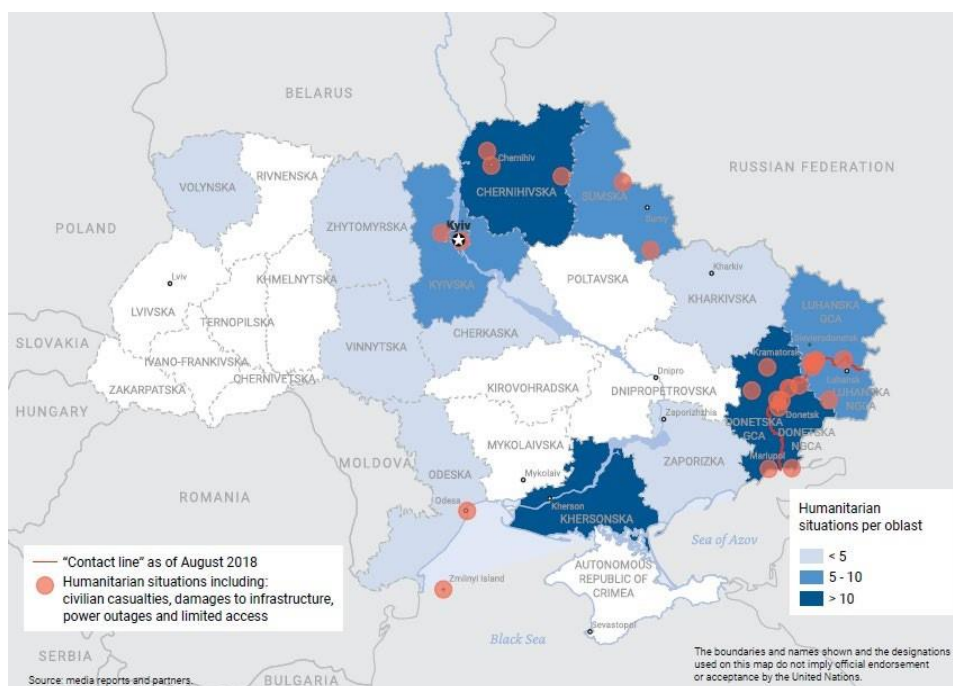*As of 5:00 p.m. on 26 February 2022*

This report is produced by OCHA Ukraine in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

KEY MESSAGES

- Russian troops enter Ukraine with intense fighting ongoing across major cities, including the capital Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson and Odessa, among others, as well as the conflict-stricken Donetska and Luhanska oblasts. Government of Ukraine declares State of Emergency and martial law.

- As of 5:00 p.m. on 26 February, OHCHR reports at least 240 civilian casualties, including at least 64 dead.[1] Damage to civilian infrastructure has left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity or water. Hundreds of homes have been damaged or destroyed, while bridges and roads damaged by shelling have left some communities cut off from markets.

- According to UNHCR, more than 160,000 people have reportedly been internally displaced and over 116,000 have been forced to flee across international borders into neighbouring European countries. Government estimates as many as 5 million refugees in worst-case scenario.

- UN agencies and humanitarian partners have been forced to suspend operations due to the deteriorating security situation. The UN and its partners maintain their presence across the country and remain committed to staying on the ground and responding to growing humanitarian needs and protection risks once the situation permits.

- UN has released US$20 million in Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) financing to support the humanitarian response. A Flash Appeal will be launched in the coming days.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

After weeks of heightened tensions and escalating conflict in eastern Ukraine, on 24 February, Russian troops entered the country. Major attacks have been reported across Ukraine, including in the capital, Kyiv, spreading widespread fear and panic that forced many people into shelters and subways as air raid sirens rang out in the streets of the capital. Russian troops have quickly expanded their presence across Ukraine, with military clashes ongoing in other major cities, like Chernihiv (north), Kharkiv (north-east), Kherson (south), Mariupol (south-east), Mykolaiv (south), Odessa (south-west), Sumy (north), among other major cities in northern, eastern and southern parts of the country, while the pre-existing hostilities in Donetska and Luhanska oblasts have significantly intensified.

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[1] OHCHR believes that real figures are considerably higher, as many reports from places where civilian casualties were reported have still been pending corroboration.

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As tensions escalated, on 23 February, the Government of Ukraine declared an initial 30-day State of Emergency, with the exception of Donetska and Luhanska oblasts, where a special security regime has been in place since 2014. The following day, on 24 February, the Government declared martial law and imposed a nightly curfew in Kyiv. The curfew is currently in place from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. In Kyiv, the curfew was put in place until 8:00 a.m. on 28 February 2022. The Ukrainian airspace remains closed as of 24 February, while the European Union Aviation Safety Agency has recommended exercising extreme caution in airspace within 185 km of both the Belarus-Ukraine and Russia-Ukraine borders. NATO has stated that it will not establish a 'no-fly zone' over Ukraine.

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy has endorsed the rollout of civil-military administrations across all oblasts and decreed a universal mobilization that facilitates the mobilization of conscripts and reservists to support the Armed Forces, banning men between 18 and 60 years old from leaving the country. On 23 February, Ukraine's parliament voted to approve in the first reading a draft law which gives permission to Ukrainians to carry firearms and act in self-defence.

Humanitarian impacts

In recent days, the long-standing conflict in eastern Ukraine has escalated, while new hotspots beyond the traditional hotbed of conflict in the Donbas region have emerged across Ukraine. The ongoing conflict continues to have severe human costs, causing a growing number of civilian casualties, interrupting livelihoods and damaging critical civilian infrastructure, including hundreds of homes, water and sanitation infrastructure, schools and health facilities.

Between 4:00 a.m. on 24 February and 5:00 p.m. on 26 February, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that at least 240 civilian casualties, including 64 dead and 176 injured across the country due to aerial and ground attacks, nearly 85 per cent recorded in Government-controlled areas,[2] figures could rise in the coming days. President Zelenskyy announced more than 130 people military personnel were killed and more than 310 others injured after the first day of Russian military operations.

Significant infrastructural damage has left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity or water, while bridges and roads damaged by shelling have left communities cut off from markets for food and other basic supplies. The most pressing humanitarian needs are emergency medical services, critical medicines, health supplies and equipment, safe water for drinking and hygiene, and shelter and protection for those displaced from their homes.

As conflict intensified in recent days, people began to flee the capital – home to nearly 3 million people[3] – and other conflict-affected areas of Ukraine, internally displacing more than 160,000 people and pushing more than 116,000 to move across borders to neighbouring European countries,[4] including Poland – where border authorities say some 100,000 people have arrived in recent days – Moldova and Romania. While the scale and scope of displacement will only likely become apparent in the coming days and weeks, Ukrainian authorities estimate that as many as 5 million people could flee the country, triggering a refugee crisis that will test response capacities in neighbouring countries.

The recent escalation in conflict comes as Ukraine deals with an Omicron-driven surge in COVID-19, which saw active cases increase by a staggering 555 per cent between 15 January and 25 February,[5] a figure that may actually be much higher due to a lack of testing. As increasing numbers of people are displaced, the increased risk of COVID-19 contagion, combined with growing numbers of injured people in need of emergency medical services, will put additional pressure on the country's already-stretched health system.

The current situation is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation in the Donbas region and generating new multi-sectoral needs across the country. Even before the current deterioration in the situation, the prolonged conflict in Ukraine had led to more than 3,000 deaths and more than 7,000 injured,[6] while damaging or destroying approximately 55,000 homes.[7] Around 2.9 million people already required humanitarian assistance, a figure that is expected to rise exponentially as a result of the intensification of armed conflict.

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[2] OHCHR believes that real figures are considerably higher, as many reports from places where civilian casualties were reported have still been pending corroboration.

[3] Statistical service of the Kyiv city.

[4] UNHCR.

[5] National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine

[6] OHCHR.

[7] 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview.

RESPONSE

National authorities and national non-governmental organizations (NNGOs) are carrying out search-and-rescue and evacuation operations, while health personnel are working tirelessly to care for those injured by the fighting. When possible, civil society and humanitarian organizations are delivering basic relief supplies to affected people, but the rapidly deteriorating security situation has largely cut off access to those most in need. UN agencies and international organizations have been forced to suspend response activities while maintaining their presence across the country, except for in some areas of Donetska and Luhanska oblasts, where NNGOs deliver limited support in an increasingly more complicated operational environment.

Despite the growing operational and security challenges they face, humanitarian organizations remain committed to staying on the ground and responding to growing humanitarian needs and protection risks. UN agencies and humanitarian partners are preparing to quickly scale-up operations when the easing of access and security limitations permit humanitarian operations to be whole-heartedly rolled out in the hardest-hit areas. In the meantime, the humanitarian community has responded quickly to the unfolding conflict, mobilizing emergency financing to facilitate an effective, wide-scale humanitarian response in Ukraine.

On 24 February, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed a 17-member Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to respond to growing humanitarian needs arising from the conflict. The DART, currently based in Krakow, Poland, is assessing the situation and identifying priority needs, and working closely with partners to provide much-needed assistance.

FUNDING AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

The UN released US$20 million dollars from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support response efforts, while the World Health Organization (WHO) mobilized $3.5 million from its Contingency Fund for Emergencies to purchase and deliver urgent medical supplies. As of 25 February, the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund has received more than 3,000 online donations totaling at least $185,000. Neighbouring governments and donors have also stepped up support for the humanitarian response.

In the coming days, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) will launch a coordinated, multi-sectoral Flash Appeal to cover the first three months of the humanitarian response across Ukraine. Additionally, UN agencies and humanitarian partners have launched sector-specific appeals and redirected internal funds to match the growing scale of needs in the conflict-stricken country.

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