

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shelling in Novoluhanske cause more misery for thousands of civilians
- Alarming rise of mine-related incidents in the East
- ‘Christmas ceasefire’ brought some relief, but a definitive ceasefire is needed to end human suffering
- Winter conditions aggravate the humanitarian situation
- US\$187 million needed in 2018 to assist 2.3 million people in need – Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)



Elderly woman stands in front of her house in Travneve village located along ‘contact line’ in eastern Ukraine/ Photo: OCHA Ukraine / Strynov

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Shelling in Novoluhanske – 3,500 people in a dire situation

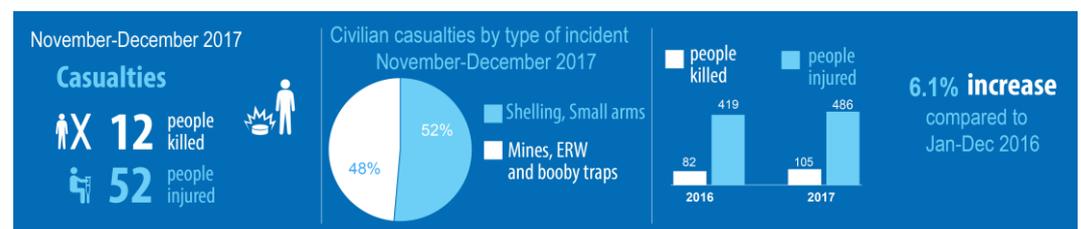
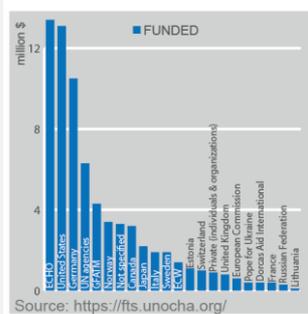
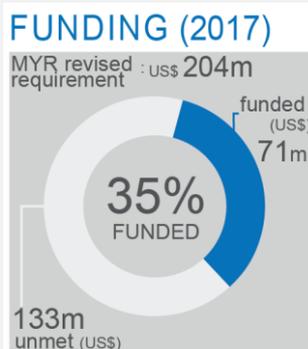
With the onset of Ukraine’s harsh winter, the well-being and protection of thousands of people living along the ‘contact line’ is worsening. While some 200,000 people living in the Government controlled areas (GCA) within five kilometers of the ‘contact line’ already experience daily shelling, thousands of them were put in further danger, when intense fighting escalated on 18 December. One of the heavily hit towns with more than 3,500 residents was Novoluhanske, Donetsk oblast, while other areas around Horlivka and Yasnouvata also witnessed an increase in hostilities.

When the residential areas of Novoluhanske were hit by the massive shelling with Multi-Launch Rocket System (Hrad), many children were at home waiting for dinner to be served, mothers returning from work or elderly people having rest. Eight people, including a child were injured during this incident. The shelling disrupted critical services – water, gas, electricity and heating supply, leaving people face to face with harsh winter in eastern Ukraine, without proper shelter, heat or food. Hundreds of houses and apartments were reportedly either damaged or destroyed. As the humanitarian situation worsened, an estimated 400 people fled for safety elsewhere.

In response, humanitarian agencies and local authorities provided timely and well-coordinated assistance and protection, including emergency construction materials, generators, blankets and food. The situation remains challenging, but people are now reportedly returning to their homes. The incident once again demonstrates that any of the 600,000 people, including 100,000 children living on both sides of the ‘contact line’ risk being caught up in the ongoing hostilities, not to mention the risk of mines and other unexploded ordnance. Their protection is the biggest concern. A definitive ceasefire is the only lasting humanitarian solution in eastern Ukraine.

Rising toll of civilian casualties

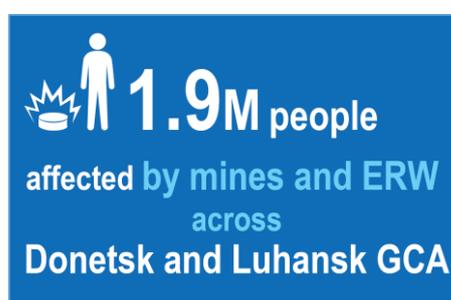
The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine is one of the deadliest in Europe since the Second World War. As a result, casualties continues to rise. In December 2017, OHCHR recorded 39 conflict-related civilian casualties (7 killed and 32 injured). This is a 56 per cent increase compared to November, when 5 civilians were killed and 20 more injured. The number of civilian casualties in December is also the highest since August 2017 with 42 civilians killed or injured. Shelling, including small-arms fire, mines, booby-traps or Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) remain the major causes of casualties among the civilians.



2017 was also one of the deadliest calendar years in terms of civilian casualties. OHCHR verifies that 105 civilians were killed and 486 were injured totalling the number of casualties to 591 civilians – this is a six per cent increase compared to 2016.

On 18 December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation announced decision to withdraw their representatives from the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC), which was enforced on the next day. This may put in question the ability of the JCCC to continue facilitation of humanitarian activities and movements in the conflict area in eastern Ukraine, and also have possible negative implications in regards to implementation of ceasefire arrangements. Nevertheless, on 23 December, parties to the conflict agreed to a so-called ‘Christmas ceasefire’ through the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) meeting in Minsk. The agreement brought some relative lull in hostilities, but field reports indicate that conflict is still active, with several locations on both sides of the ‘contact line’ affected on a daily basis.

Mine-contamination – an alarming protection concern



In 2017, mine-related incidents remained among the most frequent causes of civilian casualties. Reports of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), or ERW near educational facilities, and other areas, where children often find themselves playing are of a major concern. A single incident reported in November, when one student was killed and two more injured by mine-related incident at a local school in Staromykhailivka (Donetska oblast) is an indication of the life-

threatening risk mine-contamination brings to the everyday life of thousands of schoolchildren. Mine-contamination is widespread in both GCA and non-Government controlled areas (NGCA) along the ‘contact-line’, and is particularly bad at checkpoints, where thousands of people gather each day. The Protection Cluster reports that up to 1.9 million people are affected by mines and ERWs across both conflict-affected oblasts. OHCHR verifies some 158 mine-related casualties in 2017, raising concern for the safety and protection of millions. Mine clearance and mine-risk education activities are ongoing, but much more needs to be done in the conflict-affected areas to ensure that lives are not endangered or lost.

Humanitarian situation across all sectors deteriorates

Critical infrastructure is regularly hit, leaving millions at risk

Despite numerous calls to adhere to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Minsk Full Package of Measures to protect civilian and infrastructure, shelling continues to land in or near the critical water supply systems and pipelines. In December alone, the Donetsk Filter Station (DFS) was shelled several times, forcing DFS personnel, who often risk their lives so water continues running for some 345,000 people, to take cover in bomb shelters. The operations of the DFS continued without interruptions on every occasion, because of the bravery of the staff. However, any interruption of water supply would mean water stops running, and as a knock-on effect, the collapse of heating systems. The consequence of such a scenario is devastating, with temperatures plunging below -15 Celsius in the East, almost 1.8 million people will have to seek refuge, warmth, shelter and water.



Shelling also continued to be reported throughout November-December affecting other water facilities, such as the Horlivka Filter Station (HFS) or the Water Pumping Station “Svitlychna”. These facilities store hazardous chemical substances, such as the chlorine

The conflict in eastern Ukraine is now one of the deadliest Europe has seen since the Second World War

gas, and as such the potential for a catastrophic environmental emergency is plain to see. The WASH Cluster reported 135 incidents affecting water and sanitation facilities in 2017, with 27 incidents recorded in the last two months alone.

In addition, the situation in eastern Ukraine is further aggravated by the worn-out electricity infrastructure. Since November, unfavourable weather conditions caused electricity cuts for some 2,600 households in 21 locations of Luhanska oblast. Moreover, 21,000 households in 63 settlements were left without power. In GCA of Luhanska oblast, the wind has reportedly damaged the power lines, leaving some 24,000 houses without supply temporarily. Similar cases continue to be reported almost daily, and it is the civilians, who continue to bear the brunt. Lack of financial resources, coupled with ongoing insecurity, which means that electricity supply is not often restored immediately, make it impossible to conduct swift repairs.

Children under attack

The Education Cluster reports that in 2017, a total of 42 educational facilities were damaged on both sides of the 'contact line' by the ongoing conflict. The Cluster reiterates that there was no single month, without school being damaged or access to education impacted. An alarming trend is the reported cases of incidents, when such attacks happened during the daytime, with children and teachers attending school.



Local school walled with sandbags with ongoing class on one side and military on the other. Photo: Ashley Gilbertson/VII for UNICEF

In addition to physical damage, there were at least 22 educational facilities forced to be temporarily closed for days or weeks in 2017 due to insecurity nearby. Thus, a total of 64 educational facilities were directly affected by the conflict in 2017, either by conflict-related damage or temporary closure, affecting access to education for at least 6,500 children. During the latest escalation of violence on 18 December alone, seven schools were reported to have been damaged.

People are making impossible choices between food, medicine, shelter or their children's education

Food insecurity is a major concern, affecting over 1.2 million people

The impact of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine is severe, with 1.2 million people found to be food insecure in the two eastern oblasts. A comprehensive joint assessment by the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster (FSLC) indicates that doubled food insecurity across Donbas compared to 2016 is mainly driven by the ever growing socio-economic disconnect between the GCA and NGCA, resulting in disruption of access to markets, inflation, increased unemployment and lack of livelihoods opportunities. In GCA, the levels of severely food insecure compared to 2016 have remained stable, with some 26,000 vulnerable people, who are those most in need of food assistance. In NGCA, the level has increased three times to the level of 5 per cent, with some 150,000 severely food insecure people. People's vulnerability is further aggravated as negative livelihood-based coping strategies are applied even more, which is at extremely high level of 87 per cent in NGCA. The FSLC further reiterates that with the winter, food prices usually rise, whilst the daily kilocalorie requirements heighten. The amount of social payments, including pensions have stayed relatively the same during the reporting period. Families are coping to the extent that they cut on other expenses, making some stark and impossible choices between medicine, heating and their children's education to ensure basic daily food intake.

It has become increasingly difficult to maintain donor interest for Ukraine and for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the leading humanitarian organization delivering food assistance in emergencies, which announced its gradual phase-out from Ukraine by mid-2018. It is acknowledged that there exists an urgent need in addressing basic needs and rehabilitating livelihoods of the most food-insecure people in Ukraine, however it calls for a much higher funding level as well as stronger development actions. WFP has

encouraged its current cooperating partners – the NGOs, who have implemented the WFP work – to pursue funding directly and coordinate closely with other UN agencies, other humanitarian actors who are better positioned, have better access and more funds, trying to ensure that life-saving support reaches the most vulnerable.

The ongoing conflict has caused series of implications to the agricultural activities - one of the major sources of food and livelihoods for thousands of people. The Socio-economic Impact and Needs Assessment in eastern Ukraine carried out by FAO has identified lack of access to quality agricultural inputs as a major impediment. Increased prices, limited functionality of the markets, limited access to pasturelands, mine-contamination and continued insecurity resulted in insufficient reserves for animal feed needed to sustain self-production at households level. This is negatively impacting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable and contributing to the increase of food insecurity.

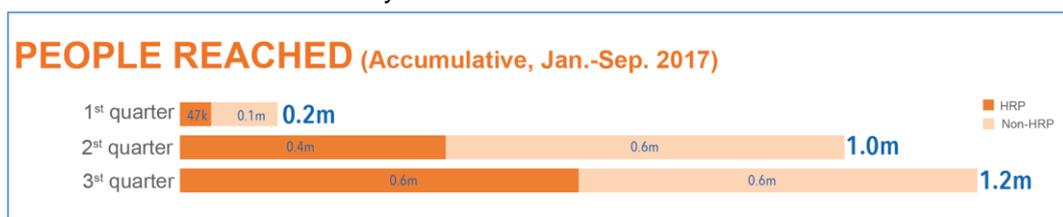
Challenges affecting 1.6 million internally displaced Ukrainians

The latest National Monitoring System [report](#) on the situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ukraine conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reveals some improvement in socio-economic trends by many of the IDPs across the country, while majority of them continue facing serious challenges on a daily basis. The report suggests a 15 per cent increase in employment of IDPs between March 2016 and December 2017, or increase in average income of IDPs since July 2017. Despite this positive trend, the share of IDP households with 'enough funds to cover only their food needs' is still high, with 33 per cent in December 2017. Some 11 per cent of IDPs reported that they had to 'limit expenses even for food'. Moreover, IDPs continue to rely heavily on government support, which is the second most frequently mentioned source of income by the IDPs surveyed within the study.

With the continuous conflict and limited prospect for return, many of the IDPs continue finding themselves in an impasse, between whether to stay in the host communities amidst multiple challenges, or return to their places of origin despite fighting. Sixty per cent of respondents in the NGCA reported that their reason to return was the possession of private property, to avoid spending already limited resources for rent. One major difference noted between IDPs in GCA and returnees to the NGCA is how they assess their safety. Only 31 per cent of surveyed returnees to the NGCA reported that they felt safe in comparison with 86 per cent of IDPs in GCA.

Despite challenges, humanitarian response continues

Humanitarians concluded an overview of ongoing response operations and issued a [dashboard](#) covering the period of January to September 2017. Despite challenges with humanitarian access and constant insecurity, humanitarians reached with assistance and protection over 1.2 million people across all sectors. Assistance included both in-kind and cash-transfer programming and targeted the most vulnerable in the conflict-affected areas, but also IDPs across the country.



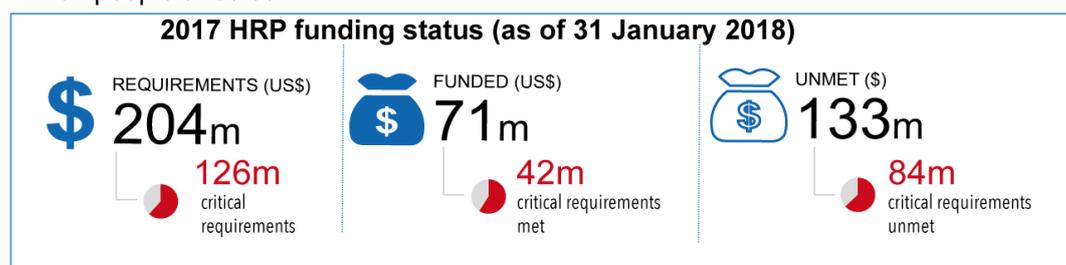
In addition, between November and December 2017, Russian Federation reportedly dispatched two convoys to Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (NGCA), with some 950 tonnes of humanitarian assistance (namely, food rations and gifts for children, schoolbooks and medical supplies).

The humanitarians are analysing response operations undertaken for the entire period of 2017 and will compile the End-Of-Year report by end of February 2018. This report will

Over 1.2 million people received assistance and protection between January – September 2017

cover achievements, analyse gaps and challenges faced by the international humanitarian community in 2017 to better inform the ongoing response operations in 2018.

Humanitarians continue stretching resources and adapt pragmatic approaches to reach with the assistance and protection people in need. However, severe underfunding of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) was a major concern. Humanitarians ended 2017 with only 35 per cent funding (US\$70 million funded of the revised requirement of \$204 million). While many of the funding towards Ukraine in 2017 still need to be recorded in the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), the trend of decreased funding over the years in Ukraine is a worrying sign, considering that the humanitarian needs are still acute with 4.4 million people affected.



To ensure effective use of available resources, record and recognize the contributions, an appeal has been made to donors and partners to reflect contributions pledged, disbursed and received at <https://fts.unocha.org>.

3.4 million Ukrainians need assistance and protection – Launch of the US\$187 million 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)

On 4 December, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine (HC), together with the Minister for the Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs (MTOT) launched the [2018 Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) for Ukraine. Over 100 representatives of embassies, UN agencies, NGOs, Government and civil society representatives attended the event. In addition, on 7 December, the HC together with the Ukraine's Permanent Representative in Geneva, representatives of Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and Save the Children briefed the UN Member States and humanitarian agencies based in Geneva on the humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine, as part of the launch of the country's HRP for 2018.



The US\$187 million 2018 HRP is a carefully elaborated and strictly prioritized plan, through which, over 32 international and 16 national organizations aim to provide assistance and protection to over 2.3 million most vulnerable people in need during 2018. While needs across all sectors are prevalent, and grow progressively, lower funding requirement of the 2018 HRP compared to 2017 is due to the strict prioritization of projects and in consideration of the existing context in Ukraine, particularly with regards to humanitarian access and capacities of organizations.

While the plan is launched and underway, urgent funding is now required to support the most vulnerable people in the east of the country during the winter months. In his remarks during the launch of the 2018 HRP in Ukraine, the HC [reiterated](#) that “the people of eastern Ukraine continue suffering the consequences of the ongoing conflict. While Ukraine may no longer be front page news, people continue to need our help” and called on the international community to show its solidarity by supporting the appeal.

Biggest exchange of prisoners since 2014

On a positive note, on 27 December, the biggest exchange of prisoners took place between the parties since the start of the conflict as part of implementation of the Minsk agreements. In total, over 300 people were released with the participation of relevant international organizations. In a statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General (SG) on Ukraine, the SG [welcomed](#) the exchange of prisoners and detainees, and expressed hope that it serves as a positive step towards strengthening the confidence among the sides, urging all parties to take further measures, including by fully respecting and upholding the ceasefire agreement and continuing to work together to fulfil all of their commitments under the Minsk agreements.

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