

# WAR IN UKRAINE - KEY HUMANITARIAN MESSAGES

HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM

FEBRUARY 2023

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*For updated numbers of people reached, including by cluster, please refer to OCHA's information products, including the [Humanitarian Situation Report](#) and the [latest 5 W](#)*

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## Key Messages

- **The humanitarian situation in Ukraine deteriorated drastically and rapidly in 2022, after Russia's invasion escalated eight years of conflict in the east of the country into a full-scale war.** Throughout the year, intense hostilities caused immense human suffering, killing and injuring thousands of civilians, forcing millions from their homes, separating families and destroying jobs and livelihoods.
- **The war continues to cause widespread death, destruction, displacement and suffering and has left nearly 18 million people – about 40 per cent of the country's population – in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.** The number of people in need of humanitarian aid and protection increased from approximately 3 million people at the start of the year February 2022.
- **The winter has brought a new dimension to the humanitarian plight amidst an energy crisis,** following almost weekly waves of attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Estimates – that are now being assessed by the UN – suggest that up to half of the country's energy infrastructure has now been damaged or destroyed.
- **More than 12.5 million households and nearly 400,000 businesses are without electricity for up to 10 hours a day.** The lack of energy is also affecting water pumping, adding to the previous challenges millions faced to access clean water or run their heating systems at home. People living in damaged homes or buildings ill-suited to protect for the winter season are at particularly high risk.
- **Overall, the massive destruction of civilian infrastructure has made life extremely difficult for millions of people and has severely disrupted critical services.** Relentless attacks hitting energy systems, schools and hospitals, homes and businesses have barred children's access to schools, made hospitals inoperable and interrupted livelihoods.
- **The war has forced millions from their homes,** and many are still being forced to flee for their lives now, as hostilities are intensifying again in areas close to the front line. At least 600,000 more people have become displaced in the past two months. At the same time, 5.5 million people have returned to their place of origin. Today, some 5.4 million Ukrainians are internally displaced, while 8 million have become refugees in Europe borders.
- **The war has also left invisible scars, exposing millions to enormous trauma.** Nearly 10 million people in Ukraine are at risk of acute stress, anxiety, depression, substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the World Health Organization.
- **The war has also profoundly disrupted the Ukrainian economy.** More than 5 million people lost their jobs, and even if the war ended today, it would take a long time for the people of Ukraine to recover from its devastating impact. Actions to improve the resilience of the people and ensure they can, since now, provide the foundation for an early recovery are crucial.
- **Since the start of the war, humanitarian organizations in Ukraine have made every effort to scale up the existing life-saving operations and expand assistance to all regions of the country. Nearly 16 million people were reached with humanitarian assistance** and protection services by aid organizations across Ukraine in 2022. They received much-needed water, food, support to repair their houses, heating appliances or warm clothes during the winter, medicines and medical supplies to make sure their hospitals continued running.

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- **Just to give another example, in 2022 humanitarians reached 6 million people with multi-purpose cash assistance**, distributing US\$1.2 billion to the people whose lives have been upended by the war. Cash assistance provided dignified flexible financial assistance to the people and supported the local economy.
- **We are also delivering over 4,000 generators to make sure critical services like hospitals and schools, as well as centres hosting displaced people, can continue operating despite the energy crisis.**
- **Over the past few months, aid organizations are particularly focusing on expanding life-saving operations to front-line areas or communities, where needs are most acute.** Since December 2022, over a dozen inter-agency convoys delivered winter supplies, medicines, shelter material and other essential supplies to the most affected communities in southern Kherson, eastern Donetsk and Kharkiv and south-eastern Zaporizhzhia regions. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, humanitarians sent thousands of convoys with aid to all parts of Ukraine, including over 30 inter-agency convoys with life-saving assistance to these areas close to the front line.
- **The work was also possible thanks to dedicated local NGOs and volunteers, and the international community and private donors, who stepped in to support Ukraine, when the country needed it the most.** Last year, humanitarian organizations received nearly 80 per cent of the US\$4.3 billion required in the Humanitarian Flash Appeal.
- **The war, however, is far from over and we will need this support to continue.** For 2023, humanitarian organizations in Ukraine will require US\$3.9 billion to provide critical aid to over 11 million people targeted for assistance.
- **Some challenges also need to be overcome to ensure every person in Ukraine who needs assistance, will receive it.** Since February 2022, the humanitarian response has been hampered by severe access constraints, particularly in areas in the east and south under the control of the Russian Federation. Humanitarians must have safe and unhindered access to help save the lives of all impacted by this war, particularly the most vulnerable groups.

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## Key humanitarian messages – long version

### Humanitarian situation

1. **One year since the Russian Federation's 24 February invasion of Ukraine, millions of people are facing life-threatening needs:**
  - **The war shows no signs of abating and continues to drive humanitarian needs across the country, especially in the south and east of the country.** Intense hostilities and fighting since the Russian invasion on 24 February have left nearly 18 million people – about 40 per cent of the country's population – in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection. This is a dramatic increase from just below 3 million people who needed humanitarian aid in the eastern Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts at the beginning of the year as a consequence of the previous nine years of the conflict.
  - **One year after the full-scale invasion, people in many parts of Ukraine still wake up daily to see their family members or loved ones killed, injured, their houses, hospitals and schools destroyed,** and they have to make hard choices, to either leave their homes or find ways to survive in areas under constant bombardment.
  - **The winter has brought a new dimension to the humanitarian plight amidst an energy crisis,** following almost weekly waves of attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure since mid-October 2022. Estimates – that are now being assessed by the UN – suggests that up to half of the country's energy infrastructure has now been damaged or destroyed.
  - **More than 12.5 million households and nearly 400,000 businesses are without electricity for up to 10 hours a day.** The lack of electricity is affecting water pumping stations, adding to the pre-existing challenges faced by millions of people to access clean water or run heating systems. People living in damaged homes or buildings ill-suited to provide protection for the winter season are at particularly high risk. According to the Ukrainian Government, over 800,000 houses have been damaged or destroyed since the start of the war, and thousands of people are now living either in collective centres or damaged places without the protection they need against the harsh winter.
  - **The situation is particularly critical in large parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions exposed to continuous shelling; some areas of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions, which shifted control and were retaken by Ukraine in the last quarter of 2022, as well as in front-line communities in the Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia regions.** Massive devastation in these areas, active fighting and the destruction of civilian infrastructure have made life unbearable for millions of people and severely disrupted critical services.
  - **In the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, for example, intense hostilities are leaving civilians killed and injured every day on both sides of the front line, and damaging critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, electricity and water supply systems.** Authorities continue to call civilians to evacuate from these areas and limited humanitarian access to Russian-controlled areas hampers aid to people in desperate need.
  - **The situation is also critical in Kherson city and the front-line communities of the region, on both sides of the front line.** Since Ukraine regained control of this area in the last quarter of 2022, attacks and hostilities have only increased, devastating essential services, impacting people's ability to flee and destroying homes and other infrastructure. Some 160,000 people who are estimated to remain in Ukrainian-controlled parts of Khersonska oblast, including some 65,000 people in Kherson, remain in need of humanitarian assistance. People living along the front line, most of them elderly or other vulnerable groups who couldn't flee, are disproportionately affected. They have to spend uncountable hours hiding from constant

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bombardment, depending on the delivery of assistance by government and humanitarian partners.

- **In the Kharkiv region, some 180,000 people living in the areas where the Government of Ukraine regained control since mid-September 2022 are still in need of vital support as months of war devastated essential services, including water, gas supplies or health care.** Recent intensification of hostilities in the oblast are further impacting civilians, and authorities are already talking about the need for evacuations from some areas.
- **Overall, we have seen horrific violations against civilians, with thousands killed, injured, or maimed, including hundreds of children.** From 24 February 2022 until early February 2023, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) verified reports on some 7,155 civilians killed— almost 440 of them children—and over 11,660 injured, including over 850 children. The actual number, however, is much higher as the collection and verification of information from several locations affected by hostilities remain severely hindered. Frequent use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in urban settings, including shelling from heavy artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems and missile and air strikes, has been reported throughout the conflict and is the cause of some 95 per cent of all civilian casualties.
- **The UN Human Rights Mission has also documented mounting allegations of enforced disappearances and displacement** and the arbitrary detention of local authorities, journalists, civil society activists and other civilians, mainly in territories controlled by the Russian Federation forces.
- **Millions have been forced to flee their homes since Russia's war on Ukraine began, in one of the world's fastest-growing displacement crises in recent history. About 5.4 million Ukrainians are still internally displaced, and some 8 million people have become refugees in European countries.** The war continues to push people from their homes every day, particularly from areas in the east and the south where intense fighting continues. At the same time, millions who had been uprooted during the first months of the war are trying to return to their places of origin. As of January 2023, some 5.6 million people returned to their houses, mainly in central and northern parts of the country, including some 20 per cent of people from abroad.
- **Access to health care has been decimated in the worst-affected areas.** Over 65 per cent of all attacks against health care in 2022 globally — around 760 out of nearly 1,150 — occurred in Ukraine. These attacks have decimated access to health services when people need them most. The situation is particularly critical in the areas under the military control of the Russian Federation, or territories that Ukraine recently regained control over, where people are facing dire challenges to have adequate medical attention or medication.
- **Access to water is also extremely limited, particularly in the Russian-controlled parts of the Donetsk region, including Mariupol and Donetsk city, and in the areas severely damaged by recent or ongoing attacks, such as Mykolaiv or Kherson.** For instance, Mykolaiv, with a pre-war population of nearly 500,000 people, had to rely on salty water from the local river for over nine months due to damages to the system in the first weeks of the war. The use of salty water has reportedly caused extensive corrosion of the pipelines, which leads to almost daily ruptures of pipers and major breakdowns of the water facilities.
- **Schools and classrooms have been attacked, destroyed, or converted into military bases throughout the war, severely hampering access to education.** The escalation of the war has affected access to quality education for 4.3 million school-aged children – 70 per cent of the estimated child population in the country. According to the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, over 3,000 education facilities across Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed by bombardment. Since the start of the school year, according to the same source, only 30 per cent of schools resumed face-to-face learning, over 40 per cent use online learning, and another

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- 30 per cent apply blended modalities, impacted by the energy crisis and limited access to the internet due to regular power outages.
- **A year into the war, thousands of schools remain inaccessible to children**, including hundreds damaged or destroyed, thousands used to host people uprooted by the war or as centres to distribute humanitarian aid, and others that are used in the conflict. Overall, the ability to learn is severely affected by acute and ongoing exposure to conflict-related trauma and psychological stress leading to a risk of school dropout and negative coping mechanisms.
  - **The war has also severely impacted agriculture in Ukraine, leaving thousands of farmers without income and one in three families food insecure.** Throughout the year, fertile land or crops were destroyed during fighting or hostilities, harvest and planting seasons were impacted, adding to the challenges imposed by the total closure of the ports for more than six months until August 2022. These left thousands of people without livelihood at a moment when the war was also devastating Ukraine's economy. A reduction of 25 per cent of the livestock among smallholders countrywide, mainly due to distress slaughtering to reduce costs, is also affecting food security. Lack of availability and access to critical agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilizers, fuel and plant protection products, will continue to negatively affect agricultural production.
  - **Access to livelihoods and market stability have also been profoundly affected**, especially in the eastern and southern oblasts, further aggravating the humanitarian situation. According to the International Labour Organization, Ukraine has reportedly lost 30 per cent of its pre-war employment, which, in combination with inflation and the overstretched social protection system, has forced Ukrainians to cut off on most basic spending.
  - **Women and girls are at heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as male prisoners of war held by Russian armed forces. Ukrainian men face specific challenges, including military conscription, which impacts their freedom of movement.** There have been reports of forced conscription of Ukrainian men in areas under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation. Overall, the war is impacting women and men in different ways, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and creating new challenges for both women and men in the country.
  - **Women from groups in vulnerable situations—particularly the elderly—are being left behind in areas experiencing fighting and disproportionately affected by disruptions caused by war.** At the same time, challenges imposed on men make the displacement and refugee flow largely gendered, and nearly 65 per cent of the internally displaced people in Ukraine are female. This creates challenges for both women and men to provide for their families and adds burden for women that have to care for their children and ill people alone, often without income.

### Humanitarian response

2. **Since the start of the war, humanitarian organizations in Ukraine have worked intensively to scale up the existing life-saving operations and expand assistance to all regions of the country:**
  - **Aid workers reached nearly 16 million people with assistance and protection in 2022.** Humanitarians provided over 12 million people with food, and 9.4 million received critical health-care support across the country. Around 7.4 million people were assisted with access to clean water and hygiene products. Nearly 3.6 million people uprooted by the war or those whose houses have been damaged have received emergency shelter or critical household items. Humanitarians have provided protection services to nearly 7.4 million people, including some 400,000 people who have been included in activities to prevent gender-based violence or support survivors. Over 3.5 million people have been reached with activities aimed at reducing the risk of injury from mines and unexploded ordnance, including mine clearance and

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awareness campaigns. Education services have reached 1.9 million children who fled their homes and schools or whose studies have been affected by the war.

- **In addition, almost 6 million people have received cash assistance.** Humanitarian cash assistance has been at the centre of the emergency response scale-up since February 2022, addressing the diverse needs of the population in a dignified manner while contributing to local economic recovery.
- **More recently, humanitarian agencies are also delivering over 4,000 generators to ensure critical services like hospitals, schools and centres hosting displaced people can continue operating despite the energy crisis.**
- **The massive scale-up of humanitarian response in Ukraine has been made possible thanks to the tireless efforts of over 650 organizations—more than 60 per cent of which are Ukrainian national NGOs—and the generous and timely support of donors.** Before the start of the war, humanitarian partners in Ukraine were delivering assistance mainly in the east, on both sides of the front line in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Today, aid workers are operating across all 24 regions, making every effort to deliver assistance to people who need it, wherever they are. The number of organizations reporting activities through the humanitarian system dramatically increased from around 120 organizations at the beginning of the year to over 650.
- **The humanitarian response is in full complementarity to the incredible work that thousands and thousands of volunteers are doing here in the country to support people. Since Russia's invasion started, thousands of civilians, most of them affected by the war themselves, became volunteers to support their own people.** They are in every corner of the country, putting their lives at risk, to make sure that millions of people in Ukraine can access clean water and health services, even if water pipes or hospitals were bombed, and that they can put food on their table, even if their crops were burned or they lost their livelihoods, and on many occasions helped people to flee areas under attack and reach safety.
- **Since the full-scale war started, there has been an outpouring of support from companies, individuals, governments, and other donors around the world, which has allowed aid organizations in Ukraine to quickly expand their presence and operations in the country.** Some 80 per cent of US\$4.3 billion requested in the Humanitarian Flash Appeal in 2022 have been received by humanitarian organizations in Ukraine. In addition, business contributions from more than 480 private sector donors to the humanitarian response in Ukraine have reached over \$1.6 billion, according to OCHA's Connecting Business initiative tracking system.
- **Furthermore, in 2022, the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, a critical source of flexible funding for first-line responders, received \$327 million from 28 donors, which made it the world's largest OCHA-managed country-based pooled fund.** Due to this generous donor support, last year, the Fund **supported the implementation of over 100 projects, reaching nearly 4 million people with life-saving assistance.**
- **Of over \$190 million distributed by the Fund, about one-third in net funding was transferred to national and local partners.** Some \$20 million was allocated to support more than 300 civil society organizations, community-based organizations and volunteer groups assisting people impacted by the war in Ukraine, especially in areas close to the front line.
- **In the addition to the humanitarian response, the UN is also working closely with the authorities to support assessments and reconstruction efforts.** UNDP is producing detailed digital maps of damaged and destroyed buildings. To date, 68 settlements have been assessed and over 230,000 buildings digitized, with plans to expand to affected areas across the country.

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### Challenges

#### 3. However, the humanitarian response has been severely hampered by insecurity and obstructions imposed on aid operations:

- **Humanitarian access in Ukraine significantly deteriorated after the start of the full-scale war in February 2022, hampering aid operations, particularly in the east.** More than 25 per cent of the nearly 18 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine live in districts where humanitarian access is extremely restricted. Humanitarian partners face various types of access constraints in 94 per cent of the raions in the eastern and southern Ukrainian regions.
- **In the first months of the war, humanitarian partners have had to navigate the complete stoppage of air travel, both passenger and cargo, damage to transport infrastructure and constant threat from air, ground and sea missiles, ground fighting and mine- and unexploded ordnance contamination in areas of active conflict, as well as military tactics—including encirclement—which have prevented humanitarians from accessing areas where civilians are in desperate need.** Amidst these challenges, humanitarian partners have rapidly adapted over the past year, utilizing a variety of operational modalities—from cash to in-kind assistance and from direct delivery to working with well-established networks to deliver aid to people in need.
- **Assistance in areas not under the control of the Ukrainian Government is extremely limited and, in most cases, impossible.** Since the start of the war, the UN and NGOs have not been able to send any relief supplies from Ukraine across the front line to areas under Russian control, despite repeated attempts and notifications to the Russian Federation. The lack of access has not only limited assistance but also impacted aid workers' ability to carry out assessments to determine the humanitarian needs in these areas. As a consequence, out of nearly 16 million people reached by humanitarian partners since February, just above 1.3 million are in areas not controlled by the Government of Ukraine.
- **Some bureaucratic impediments have also been reported in areas under Ukrainian control,** including visa delays, a lack of clarity over the registration process for newly established NGOs, risk of mobilization for male staff of humanitarian organizations and unresolved issues around the VAT exemptions for humanitarian aid.
- **The closure of the banking system in areas beyond the Ukrainian Government's control adds to the challenges faced by humanitarians to operate there and for people to access services.** The situation, in particular, remains extremely complex in the areas controlled by the Russian Federation. There have been no fully-functional banking systems in the areas beyond the control of the Ukrainian Government in Donetska and Luhanska oblasts since 2014. The impossibility of crossing the front lines since February 2022 made it more challenging to deliver assistance there and for NGOs to operate.
- **It is imperative, and extremely urgent, that humanitarians in Ukraine have safe and unhindered access to provide assistance to all people who have been impacted by this senseless war, no matter where they live.** It also includes the safe passage for civilians living in areas experiencing active hostilities, so they can safely and freely leave the areas if they decide to do so, and in the direction of their choice.