



**UKRAINE
FOOD SECURITY
& LIVELIHOODS CLUSTER**

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Photo: FAO/ Viktoriia Mykhalchuk

42% out of 1.5M people in Eastern Ukraine are food insecure

Only 80,000 people currently planned to be reached with food and livelihoods support in 2021

Overview

In 2014, armed conflict divided the eastern Donbas region into government-controlled areas and non-government-controlled areas in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and displaced over 1.4 million people, according to the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP). Coal mining and other industrial employment were the main livelihoods and economic drivers in the region before the upheaval. Since the beginning of the conflict, unemployment rates in conflict-affected oblasts have been significantly higher than average for Ukraine and continue to deteriorate. Pandemic restrictions have exacerbated the problems of pre-existing challenges such as restricted humanitarian access to NGCA.



KEY FIGURES

- 1.5 million people are in need of food security assistance in the Eastern Ukraine in 2021, marking its 8th year of armed conflict
- 51% increase in number of people in need of food and livelihoods assistance compared to 2020
- 33% of affected populations meet part of their food needs through own production
- 200,000 people in Government-Controlled Areas (GCA) need livelihoods support
- 57% of people in Non-Government-Controlled Areas (NGCA) adopted negative coping mechanisms to meet basic needs

FOOD SECURITY FOR HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIVES

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Humanitarian access constraints: *Appeal to the authorities in NGCA to allow humanitarian access to affected populations*

The humanitarian sector experienced access challenges before the pandemic, although residents could cross the entry-exit checkpoints (EECPs) monthly between NGCA and GCA to access their social benefits, health care, and other services. The crossing of the “contact line” has witnessed a sharp decrease of 93%, compared to the usual average of 1.2 million individuals crossing each month (UNHCR data). As of today, 2 out of 7 EECPs are operational, and access to the NGCA is getting tighter, both for people and humanitarian assistance.

Lack of humanitarian access to affected populations is causing an imbalance in the number of people reached, with the bulk of assistance going to GCA. Currently, partners are unable to deliver immediate lifesaving assistance, which will likely reverse food security gains made over the years. Both before and during the pandemic, local authorities restricted assessments made by phone about food security and livelihoods in NGCA, discouraging affected populations from participating, thereby further constraining access to those in need.

Food security situation in Luhansk GCA: *Urgent action to prevent the situation in Luhansk Oblast from deteriorating*

The food security situation in Luhansk Oblast demands early action. A pre-winter assessment by an FSLC partner found that a high proportion of households have a poor or borderline Food Consumption Score in Luhansk Oblast, notably higher in the greater urban area (28%) and urban area (21%), compared to an overall rating of 11% (out of 5.7 million people living in conflict-affected regions). Despite one-third of the population meeting food needs through their own production, the vast majority are now experiencing food insecurity. The rural population also has extremely high food expenditure levels, which is pushing them to the brink of collapse.

Humanitarian Development Nexus (HDN): *Increase support and investment in livelihoods*

Despite the achievements of the partners, the information collected by the joint reporting on the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPF), under Pillar 4: Human security, social cohesion and recovery with a particular focus on Eastern Ukraine in 2020, the need for livelihoods support and linking it with the HDN is still overwhelming. Since the beginning of the conflict, unemployment rates in conflict-affected oblasts were significantly higher than average for Ukraine. There is currently low investment in livelihoods activities, and partners need to scale up their livelihood response.

Despite the pandemic restrictions, the conditions on the ground for scaling up livelihoods’ activities are favorable for agriculture inputs, micro-economic initiatives, household income-generating activities, rehabilitating agricultural infrastructure, and development of risk-informed programs on fire prevention, linking farms to markets, and local value chain. The number of fire spikes during the summer months is increasing, with devastating consequences on livelihoods. Needs-based projects should therefore be prioritized. These should be focused on providing essential services through a market-based approach, community participation and strengthening systems, and fostering partnership. Livelihood support to isolated communities is consistent with ensuring sustainable service delivery, including addressing back-chain supplies, driving factors of food insecurity and the limited access to production inputs, and the lack of employment opportunities.

Reduced access to farmland: *Address landmines/ERWs impact and land property right issues*

Landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) remain one of the key concerns in Ukraine, causing rural areas not to be fully engaged in agricultural production: preliminary estimates by national authorities show some 7,000 km² of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in GCAs are contaminated with antipersonnel mines and ERW, impeding people’s access to their own farmland for their own production.

As the moratorium on the sale of agricultural land will expire in June 2021, which has deprived millions of landowners of their constitutionally enshrined property rights, the FSLC partners express concerns that the lack of proper regulations could affect returnees’ and other vulnerable groups’ access to farmland. The cluster will work closely with FAO and the Protection Cluster to address legal issues that might arise due to the land market reopening. Agriculture production is paramount to advancing economic growth in Ukraine.

Increased conflict and response to meet basic needs

The current heightened risk of a flare in hostilities following large deployment of troops, could worsen the food insecurity situation by forcing people to leave their homes and livelihoods, eroding their capacity to cope.

Humanitarian assistance could be hampered by restricted operations in NGCA, which would prevent some 1 million people from receiving food and livelihoods support.

If partners' capacity gaps and the lack of investment in livelihoods support continue to be unaddressed, some 870,000 people will not be able to meet their basic needs. They will be forced to grapple with poorer living conditions and loss of income-earning opportunities, which will likely lead them to turn to negative coping strategies and into worse food insecurity.

FSLC strategic objectives

- Ensure immediate access to food for the most vulnerable people affected by conflict and/or COVID-19.
- Improve food security through emergency and time-critical agricultural support.
- Enhance the resilience of vulnerable people affected by conflict and/or COVID-19 by restoring and investing in sustainable livelihoods.

FSLC is working with partners to:

- Increase humanitarian access to the affected population in NGCA and address immediate food security and livelihoods needs.
- Implement response plans for the food security situation in Luhansk GCA and other conflict areas.
- Promote partners' abilities to reach more people in need of humanitarian assistance.
- Redress the imbalance in humanitarian response between GCA and NGCA.
- Work with partners to address gaps in capacity and encourage new actors to operate in Ukraine, particularly those with specialized skills in livelihoods development.
- Enhance the capacities of local NGOs.
- Enhance livelihoods and build resilience and the vulnerable population's ability to cope with stresses.
- Develop local value chains that were disrupted by conflict and COVID-19 restrictive measures.
- Restore returnees' access to safe and landmines/ERWs-free agricultural lands.
- Promote agricultural best practices, fire breaks, and forest conservation, particularly following the long dry season.

Number of people in need of food and livelihood support by region

Source: 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, FSLC

Number of people in need in food and livelihood support by region

