



**UKRAINE  
FOOD SECURITY  
& LIVELIHOODS CLUSTER**

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Photo: FAO/ Viktoriia Mykhalchuk

# 1.5M people need food and livelihoods support in eastern Ukraine

Funding levels drastically low and just 80,000 people currently targeted for food security assistance in 2021

## Background

In 2014, armed conflict divided the eastern Donbas region into government-controlled areas (GCAs) and non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and **displaced over 1.4 million people**, according to the Ministry of Social Policy. Prior to the upheaval, coal mining and other industrial sectors were the main livelihoods and economic drivers in the region. 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 also exacerbated pre-existing challenges such as **restricted humanitarian access** to NGCAs.



Source: OCHA

## KEY FIGURES

- 1.5 million people need food security and livelihoods assistance in Eastern Ukraine in 2021
- 51% increase in number of people in need of food and livelihoods assistance compared to 2020
- One-third of affected populations meet part of food needs through own production
- 200,000 people in GCAs need livelihoods support
- 57% of people in NGCAs use negative coping mechanisms to meet basic needs
- 2021 marks 8<sup>th</sup> year of armed conflict

FOOD SECURITY FOR HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIVES

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## *FSLC appeal to the authorities in NGCAs to allow humanitarian access to affected populations*

Although there were humanitarian access challenges before the pandemic, residents could cross entry-exit checkpoints (EECPs) monthly between NGCAs and GCAs to access social benefits, healthcare, and other services. **Crossings of the “contact line” have decreased by 93%** compared to the average of 1.2 million people each month (UNHCR<sup>4</sup>). Today, only two out of seven EECPs are operational, and access to NGCAs is getting tighter, both for citizens and humanitarian workers.

The lack of humanitarian access to affected populations is causing an imbalance in the number of people reached, with the **bulk of assistance going to GCAs. Partners are currently 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 NGCAs, discouraging affected populations from participating and thereby further constraining access to those in need.

## *Urgent action needed to prevent food insecurity from deteriorating in Luhanska GCA*

The food security situation in Luhanska Oblast demands early action. A pre-winter assessment by an FSLC partner<sup>5</sup> found that a high proportion of households have a poor or borderline Food Consumption Score in Luhanska 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): Need to increase support for and investment in livelihoods*

Despite partners’ achievements, including on Pillar 4 of the joint UN-Government of Ukraine Partnership Framework in eastern Ukraine in 2020, there is still an overwhelming need for livelihoods support and to link this with the HDN. Since the start of the conflict, unemployment rates in conflict-affected oblasts have risen significantly higher than average for Ukraine.

**There is currently low investment in livelihoods activities, and partners need to scale up this response.** Despite pandemic restrictions, conditions on the ground for scaling up livelihoods activities are favourable for agricultural inputs, micro-economic initiatives, household income-generating activities, rehabilitating agricultural infrastructure, and developing risk-informed programmes on fire prevention, linking farms to markets, and value chains. 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, as well as fostering partnership. Livelihoods support for isolated communities is consistent with ensuring sustainable service delivery, including and addressing back-chain supplies. **Driving factors of food insecurity are limited access to production inputs and lack of employment opportunities.**

## *Address landmines/explosive remnants and property rights so farmers can access land*

Landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) remain one of the key concerns in Ukraine, limiting engagement in agricultural production: preliminary estimates by national authorities show some **7,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Donetska and Luhanska Oblasts in GCAs are contaminated with antipersonnel mines and ERW**, impeding people’s access to their farmland for their own production.

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. FSLC partners are concerned that a 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 calls for greater response to meet basic needs

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

Humanitarian assistance could be hampered by restricted operations in NGCAs, 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 go 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 negative coping strategies and spiraling 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 by restoring and investing in sustainable livelihoods.

### FSLC is working with partners to:



**Increase humanitarian access** to affected populations in NGCA and address immediate food security and livelihoods needs.



**Implement food security response** plans in Luhanska GCA and other conflict areas. Enhance partners' abilities to **reach more people** in need of humanitarian assistance.



**Redress the imbalance** in humanitarian response between GCA and NGCA.



**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**.



**Support livelihoods and build resilience** and vulnerable people's ability to cope.



**Develop local value chains** that were disrupted by conflict and COVID-19 restrictions.

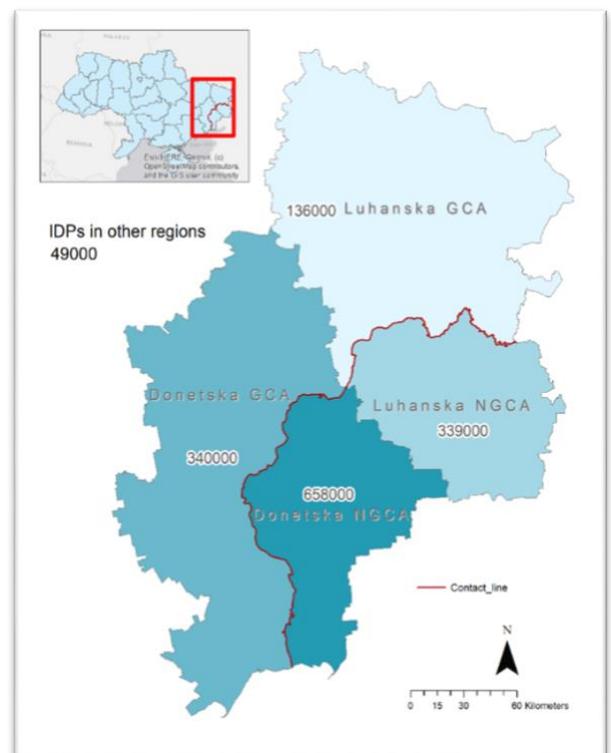


**Restore returnees' access** to safe farmland that is free of landmines/ERW.



Promote **agricultural best practices**, fire breaks and forest conservation, particularly following the long dry season.

## Number of people in need of food and livelihoods support, by region



Source: 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, FSLC