

# SITREP #3: UKRAINE CRISIS

## CARITAS MUST SCALE UP UKRAINE RESPONSE

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### Overview

Humanitarian needs are growing in Ukraine. The situation is particularly critical in Non Government Controlled Areas (NGCAs), which have been cut off from salaries and benefits since early July 2014. Restrictions imposed by the government on the movement of people and goods have further exacerbated the situation. An alarming number of civilian institutions including schools, hospitals, kindergartens and orphanages have been destroyed and damaged. Even though the ceasefire is largely holding, small scale fighting has continued to take place and acts of terrorism are being perpetrated throughout the country, feeding fear and economic instability. Diplomatic signalling suggests that the next target of separatist groups is likely to be the region of Mariupol.

Since the beginning of the conflict, over 1.7 million people have fled their homes, including over one million IDPs registered across the country and an estimated 743,000 people who have fled to neighbouring countries (the majority – 607,900 – to Russia). An estimated 5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, including some 3.2 million who are highly vulnerable. The fact that many hospitals and clinics are closed or only partially operational due to the lack of medicines, medical supplies and personnel, as well as damages and destruction is particularly worrying as communicable diseases are already on the rise in conflict-affected areas. Around 1.4 people require health assistance.

Overall, the physical and psychological needs of civilians caught in the fighting is growing by the day and the capacity of authorities and communities to respond to ever growing needs is exhausted. Funding however, remains critically low.



## CI Humanitarian Director's visit in Ukraine

Suzanna Tkalec, CI Humanitarian Director, was part of the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) mission in Ukraine from March 12th to 14th. The EDG met with the government in Kiev, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international NGOs that are part of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to assess the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. They also visited the city of Donetsk in the Non-Government Controlled Areas in the East.

“The situation in Donetsk is desperate and heartbreaking. We visited an underground bomb shelter without air, light and adequate sanitation where 80 people, the majority of which children, have been living for the past eight months. Children have skin diseases and lice due to poor sanitary conditions and are deeply traumatized. These people are being supported through food and basic items, but it is of utmost urgency to find adequate housing solutions,” said Suzanna Tkalec.

It is estimated that half of the children in conflict-affected areas are out of school, with many too afraid to return even during the ceasefire. Schools, kindergartens and orphanages have been destroyed and damaged during the conflict.

This conflict is having a particularly devastating impact on older people, who account for the majority of those remaining in non-government-controlled areas, both due to their physical inability to flee and their reticence to do so. Supplies to treat the non-communicable diseases ordinarily faced by older people – such as hyper tension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease – have dwindled leaving many older people without adequate treatment. The EDG was also shocked to hear that the Government



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Suzanna Tkalec

has not permitted adult diapers to be carried across conflict lines, on the basis that they may be used as bandages for the war wounded.

Public buildings have been targeted by separatist groups. Hospitals and clinics lack the most basic supplies, such as antibiotics, IV fluids, gloves and gauze to say the least.

The ability to increase the delivery of assistance and protection to those in need is heavily contingent upon impediments to humanitarian access being removed. The main recommendations provided by the EDG are to remove the high level of bureaucracy to process permits for assistance in non government controlled areas, to harmonise and improve inadequate and inconsistent legal frameworks around taxation of humanitarian assistance and to decentralise coordination of humanitarian assistance from Kiev to the areas where the greatest needs are.

Beyond restrictions on humanitarian access, the absence of funding for humanitarian action is the biggest impediment to the response.

The Caritas network has a crucial role to play- says Tkalec- we need to scale up the response in general and in particular in non government controlled areas in order to provide the assistance to which conflict affected people are entitled. The fact that the crisis in Ukraine is being perceived as primarily political overshadows the significant and growing humanitarian needs. It is crucial for the Caritas network to keep sensitizing their constituencies about the nature of the crisis and to keep mobilizing resources for the response. This is a crisis that will not end anytime soon.

## Caritas response – reaching out to the most vulnerable

As a well ingrained local actor committed to securing social assistance and support for the neediest segments of Ukrainian society, Caritas Ukraine has been on the frontline to reach the most vulnerable affected groups since the onset of the crisis through local dioceses and through the establishment of a capillary network of offices in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kramatorsk, Slovyansk, Zaporizhya, Eastern Ukraine.

Caritas Ukraine is continuously supported to increase its capacity and outreach through the Caritas network (Caritas Austria, CRS, Caritas Germany) and is strategically guided by a Ukraine Steering Group formed by several Caritas network members, Caritas Europa and Caritas Internationalis.

The Caritas response in Ukraine is further strengthened through response programs implemented through other Caritas network members (Caritas Austria, Caritas Czech, Secours Catholique).

By and large, the Caritas network has been responding to the most urgent needs of affected populations all over Ukraine in all critical sectors (food & NFIs, health, psychosocial support, legal support, education, rehabilitation of civilian institutions, protection) and is committed to keep supporting vulnerable groups in the long term.



## Accessing Non Government Controlled Areas

Caritas Ukraine has already provided food parcels to some 300 people in Donetsk and is reaching out to the most vulnerable through a system of hotlines that IDPs can use to seek support. Social workers are continuously registering new coming IDPs. A well established system for collection and distribution of relief items is in place.

Caritas Ukraine is setting-up a soup kitchen program in Donetsk and is planning to provide assistance to occupied territories through mobile teams (Caritas Germany).

With the ceasefire agreement, the main goal of Caritas Ukraine is to increase its presence in occupied territories. Several programs are already in the pipeline and Caritas Ukraine is ready to scale up its response and to welcome more support from Caritas network members.



## Fleeing from Non Government Controlled Areas

“People are hiding in basements, hungry and freezing, but they don’t go away from a conflict area because they are afraid of Western Ukraine,” IDP woman from Donbas.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the diocesan Caritas of Sambir-Drohobych has been providing help to more than 1000 IDPs and vulnerable conflict affected people. Beneficiaries have been provided with food support, winter clothes, medical aid and medical kits, legal support, rent and utilities support, employment assistance and psycho-social support.

In March 2014 nearly 100 Crimean Tartar families moved to Drohobych. These families have been accommodated and helped with financial and psychological support. After March, the inflow of IDPs from Luhansk to Donetsk oblasts has been growing by the day. January and February 2015 have been the most challenging months for us, because not only residential buildings, kindergartens and schools have been destroyed, but the whole infrastructure of cities in eastern Ukraine has been damaged- explains Nataliya Golynska, administrative director of Caritas Sambir-Drohobych.

Many of the IDPs fleeing from eastern Ukraine have undergone deeply traumatic experiences. Two families from Debaltsevo for instance, saw their houses destroyed by shelling and lost family members during bombings. Despite their courageous attempt to stay in their native town, they had to give up their hopes and flee for their lives.

### Oksana, an IDP who fled with her three children and mother-in-law



“We came from Donetsk oblast, not far from Shahtar town. Our village was constantly shelled. In the beginning the situation in our area was highlighted in the media, but then we were forgotten. Our house was completely destroyed. My husband died when our village was shelled, there were five more people killed at that time.

“When the situation became really critical, we moved to Yenakievo, and then - in Kramatorsk. We lived together with other IDPs in one big room. To be honest, many people are afraid of moving to Western Ukraine. In our village people are hiding in basements, hungry and freezing, but they are scared to move away from a conflict area. We weren’t frightened. My children had a chance to visit Ivano-Frankivsk during school vacation, that’s why I don’t understand all these fears and prejudices about Western Ukraine.

“Assistance to Kramatorsk comes from Western Ukraine. DNR and LNR rebels gave us absolutely nothing. Caritas gave us a nice room and safe living conditions. We hope to go back home, but only under the condition that our territory is under the control of the Ukrainian government.”

Caritas Sambir-Drohobych keeps mobilizing all efforts to reaching out to IDPs and civilians caught up in the conflict.

Photos by Daniele Donati/ FAO, Caritas Ukraine.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: CI Emergency Response Team [emergencies@caritas.va](mailto:emergencies@caritas.va)**