Ukraine – conflict

ETC Situation Report #23
Reporting period: 01/05/2023 to 31/05/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated in Ukraine on 3 March 2022 following the escalation of armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. ETC SitReps are distributed every month.

Highlights

- The ETC is supporting the initiative agreed with UNDSS to relocate the main Remote Security & Information Operations Centre (RSIOC) from Mukachevo to Kyiv, to be closer to operational coordination. The ETC is now finalizing the installation of equipment in a temporary RSOC located in a UNDSS office building in Kyiv. This temporary RSOC will operate in parallel with the current RSIOC in Mukachevo, while UNDSS identifies a permanent location. The temporary RSOC in Kyiv will be staffed by three operators to monitor the VHF radio network and satellite phone communications.

The ETC conducts security communications training at the WHO office in Kyiv on 17 May. Photo: WFP/ETC

- The ETC continues to develop the Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) project—a pilot mobile VHF radio solution for UN armoured vehicles on mission in high-risk areas. The ETC deployed the RSoV on a mission to Sumy on 29 May with a WFP Security Officer on board to conduct tests during the journey. A further two field missions to Odesa and Luch are planned to continue testing the vehicle set-up.

- The cluster delivered two Plain Language training sessions with CLEAR Global for UN agencies and their NGO partners on 29 and 31 May. 'Plain language' is a communications discipline focused on clarity, and the goal of the workshops is to help affected people find and use information via humanitarian services. The first two sessions were delivered by the ETC in Ukraine and CLEAR Global in February. Read more on the Plain Language workshops here.

Overview

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports that 3.6 million people are internally displaced in Ukraine due to the conflict as of 30 April 2023, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the total number of Ukrainian refugees recorded across Europe at over 8.2 million as of 23 May 2023.

Impact on telecommunications

Increased nightly aerial attacks have been observed in Ukraine in May.

The continued attacks on national infrastructure across Ukraine have led to significant damage to national telecommunications infrastructure, resulting in severe communications blackouts across the country. Disruption to electrical power supplies supporting telecommunications equipment impacts on ETC services.

Several reports have been received of severe disruptions to satellite telephony services in areas close to the frontlines. The ETC is exploring solutions to provide responders deploying on frontline missions with services and equipment.

Activities

Security communications – VHF radio network

The ETC has deployed the VHF radio network for improved security communications services for UN agencies in four locations—Dnipro, Kyiv, Odesa, and Kramatorsk. The VHF Remote Sites (RS) set up in these four locations are all connected to the main Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) based in Mukachevo.

The ETC is working to expand the existing VHF radio network by applying for additional radio frequency licenses. On 12 May, the ETC received further verbal acknowledgement from the Ukrainian State Centre of Radio Frequencies (UCRF) that frequency licenses for 15 oblasts will be allocated. The licenses must be approved by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

As part of the VHF radio network expansion and enhancement project across Kyiv, Dnipro, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Luch, the ETC has registered the Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT) as a vendor to enable the installation of VHF repeaters on BRT towers. This activity will improve the VHF radio coverage in the operational areas, as well as facilitate the expansion of the VHF network.

The ETC is supporting the initiative agreed with UNDSS to relocate the main RSIOC from Mukachevo to Kyiv, to be closer to operational coordination. The ETC is now finalizing the installation of equipment in a temporary RSOC located in a UNDSS office building in Kyiv. This temporary RSOC will operate in parallel with the current RSIOC in Mukachevo, while UNDSS identifies a permanent location. The temporary RSOC in Kyiv will be staffed by three operators to monitor the VHF radio network and satellite phone communications.

Further, the ETC deployed a telecommunications assistant to support UNDSS on setting up a back-up RSOC in Lviv in case of UN staff relocation or evacuation.

In May, the ETC programmed 64 VHF handheld and mobile radios for UNDSS, OCHA, WHO, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), IOM, and WFP in the operational areas. Radio programming services can be requested through a ticketing system via email ukraine.etcservicedesk@wfp.org.

Security communications – Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) project

The ETC continues to develop the Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) project—a pilot mobile VHF radio solution for UN armoured vehicles on mission in high-risk areas.

After modifying a Starlink kit with a local telecommunications company, the ETC was assisted by a local vehicle workshop to install and configure telecommunications equipment in the armoured vehicle. The communication tests with the RSOC in Kyiv for both Starlink

connectivity and radio signal showed very good results. The power bank installation was also improved.

The ETC deployed the RSoV on a mission to Sumy on 29 May with a WFP Security Officer on board to conduct tests during the journey. A further two field missions to Odesa and Luch are planned to continue testing the vehicle set-up.

Security communications – capacity building

The ETC is implementing a large-scale capacity building plan, based on the findings of the survey mapping exercise conducted at the beginning of May. The survey identified the need to provide security communications training to 600 UN staff from 10 UN agencies in Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa, and Lviv.

As part of this plan, in May, the cluster conducted 21 security communications trainings in Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Lviv and Poltava for a total of 208 staff of WFP, IOM, HRMMU, OCHA, WHO, IOM, UNDSS, FAO, UN WOMEN, and UNICEF.

Secure data connectivity

The ETC is supporting internet connectivity services in the inter-agency hubs in Dnipro, Odesa and Lviv. The ETC data connectivity network is secured with a cyber-security setup provided by ETC partner Cisco Crisis Response. Since the launch of the services, 310 users from 14 agencies have registered on the network.

ETC ICT Helpdesk

The ETC continues to support UNDP, UNHCR, OCHA, IOM, and UNDSS in the Odesa inter-agency premises with audio-visual equipment, installation of telecommunications equipment, and internet connectivity issues.

Services for communities

The ETC took part in a video design to showcase the experience of ETC services delivery for communities in Ukraine as part of the annual ETC Plenary 2023, held in Copenhagen and hosted by UNHCR.

The ETC finished working with the Technical Review and Assessment Committee (TRAC) for the Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) call centre project in Ternopil. The project is now under review by the Cooperating Partner Committee (CPC).

The cluster delivered two Plain Language training sessions with CLEAR Global for personnel from UN agencies and their NGO partners on 29 and 31 May. 'Plain language' is a communications discipline focused on clarity, and the goal of the workshops is to help affected people find and use information via humanitarian services. The first two sessions were delivered by the ETC in Ukraine and CLEAR Global in February. See more on the Plain Language workshops here.

A total of 19,497 users have accessed information relating to humanitarian assistance through the ETC Chatbot, vBezpetsi, since its launch.

As of 31 May, users of the ETC Chatbot most frequently used the service to access information on humanitarian aid (73%), hotlines and referral methods (16%), human rights (6%), and other useful information (5%). When seeking information on humanitarian aid, users most frequently consulted categories related to general cash assistance and to WFP

assistance.

The ETC is taking forward the exit strategy and closure of its Chatbot in Ukraine. On 17 May, the ETC conducted a Lessons Learned workshop dedicated to the ETC Chatbot with the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the positive aspects of the Chatbot service since its launch and the challenges faced. This session was a part of the closure of the ETC Chatbot service.

Dashboard

See the ETC Dashboard for an overview of service locations.

Funding

The ETC in Ukraine continues to utilize funds received in 2022 for the projects approved in 2022 with no cost extension.

New funding of US$921 thousand has been received to meet the US$1.4 million funding requirement to carry out activities in 2023. These activities include the expansion of the VHF radio networks to the frontlines in eastern Ukraine.

Challenges

The waiting time of getting a license from governmental authorities is also a bottleneck to faster expansion of VHF network.

Security issues in the newly accessible locations in eastern Ukraine are a constraint in the implementation of telecommunications solutions.

The risk of cyber-attacks in Ukraine is considered high.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the Ukraine response will take place on **29 June 2023**.

Contacts

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Further information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict

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