

Ukraine – conflict

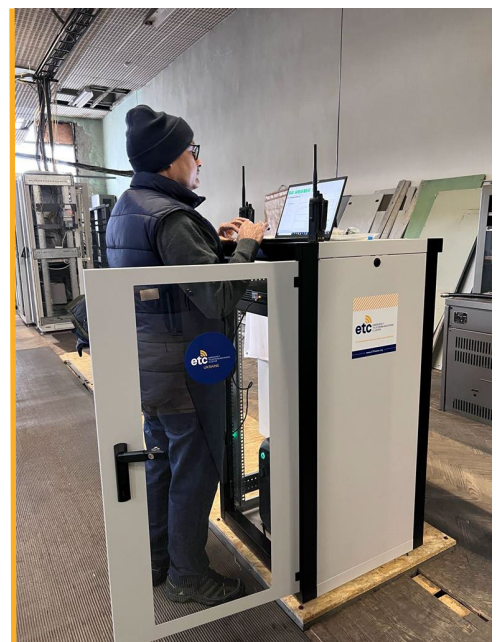
ETC Situation Report #30

Reporting period: 01/12/2023 to 31/12/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated in Ukraine on 03 March 2022 following the escalation of armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. ETC SitReps are distributed monthly.

Highlights

- In December, new radio repeaters were installed in Dnipro and Lviv in collaboration with the Ukrainian Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT) to expand the VHF radio coverage in Ukraine.
- On 22 December, an agreement was signed between WFP USA and WFP Rome HQ for the in-kind donation of equipment from ETC partner Cisco Crisis Response with a value of US\$500,000. This equipment is planned to secure the VHF radio backbone network in Ukraine.
- On 29 December—for the first time—the Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) solution integrated into a truck was used during an inter-agency mission led by UNICEF to Toretsk, Donetsk oblast, which is very close to the frontline. System monitoring showed that the RSoV system was online for the whole duration of deployment. The mission up to frontline areas maintained a clear radio communication with the UNDSS Security Information and Operations Centre (SIOC) in Kyiv.



The ETC deployed security communications equipment in Lviv on 07 December to expand VHF radio coverage in the city. Photo: WFP/ETC

Overview

The situation in Ukraine continues to worsen, marked by persistent airstrikes and ground fighting causing extensive devastation to lives, livelihoods, civilian infrastructure, and resulting in substantial increase in humanitarian needs.

Since the commencement of the large-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the toll has exceeded 27,768 civilian casualties, encompassing 9,806 fatalities and 17,962 injuries as of 08 October, according to the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#). The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) reports that approximately 3.7 million people have become internally displaced in Ukraine due to the conflict as of 25 September. Additionally, the [Office of the United Nations High](#)

[Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) estimates that the global count of Ukrainian refugees has surpassed 6.3 million as of 13 December.

Impact on telecommunications

On 13 December, a cyberattack targeting one of Ukraine's largest mobile operators resulted in millions of people losing access to mobile network. Consequently, the air raid alert system in northern and central areas of the country experienced disruptions.

Continuing reports highlight significant disturbances to mobile and satellite telephony services in regions close to the frontlines. The ETC is actively exploring solutions to provide communications services and equipment for responders deployed in frontline missions.

Amid the escalating conflict, cyberattacks persist with varying impacts, affecting service availability in some cases, and targeting the unauthorized release of data in others. The ETC remains committed to safeguarding its connectivity services and employs advanced firewall protection implemented in collaboration with Cisco.

ETC Activities

Coordination

In December, the ETC submitted its final inputs into the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for Ukraine, coordinated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). In 2024, the cluster will prioritize the extension and deployment of security communications services in the areas close to the frontline, as well as to the central and western parts of Ukraine, remotely connecting the VHF radio network via the internet to be monitored by the UNDSS Security Information and Operations Centre (SIOC) in Kyiv. Further, the ETC will support a shared pool of mobile communications modules, prepositioned in the common operational areas—Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odesa, Kyiv—dedicated to UN armoured vehicles and inter-agency convoys. In addition, the cluster plans to provide digital tools to enhance affected people's access to humanitarian information and assist national and local authorities to support the affected population.

Security communications (radio)

VHF radio network

The ETC continued to extend the coverage of the VHF radio network in partnership with the Ukrainian Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT). The expansion aims to enhance and provide security communications services in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Lviv, and Luch.

In December, the new repeaters in Dnipro and Lviv were installed in collaboration with the BRT, and the expanded coverage is being mapped. The cluster also identified new locations for VHF radio repeater installations in 2024 and shared them with BRT for initial pre-assessment to confirm the availability and access to the sites, as most of them are located in the areas close to the frontlines.

Separately, the ETC supported UNHCR to configure the installed VHF radio base station in the Kyiv on 05 December to enhance the service.

Backup Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC)

The ETC relocated the backup RSOC in Lviv on 22 December as part of support provided to UNDSS. The backup RSOC in the UNDSS office is equipped with six VHF base stations, one laptop with dispatcher software, and one satellite phone docking station. Six base stations are monitoring seven remote sites in Lviv, Kyiv, Odesa, Luch, Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Kramatorsk, as well the four deployed RSoV kits—two in Dnipro, one in Kyiv, and one in Odesa. The backup RSOC equipment was fully installed and is now on standby to be operated by Kyiv UNDSS SIOC operators.

Radio programming

The ETC continues its large-scale radio re-programming project for UN agencies in line with the new additional frequencies issued in July 2023. Around 98% (1655 out of 1680) of handheld radios and 83% (195 out of 267) of vehicle radios required in the plan have been reprogrammed. The ETC is collaborating with each agency's ICT staff on the reprogramming process.

The breakdown of radio programming conducted this month is as follows:

- Dnipro: 10 mobile radios reprogrammed for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), seven VHF handheld radios for WHO, one VHF handheld radio for WFP and 21 handhels for UNDP;
- Lviv: One base station and one mobile radio programmed for UNDSS, two VHF handhels for WHO and eight handhels for WFP;
- Odesa: Worked on ICOM code plug for newer radio models, two mobile radios reprogrammed for OHCHR and IOM, and one mobile radio for UNHCR;
- Remotely supported UNICEF and UNHCR with radio reprogramming.

ETC radio programming services can be requested through a ticketing system via email: ukraine.etc servicedesk@wfp.org

Remote Site on Vehicle (RsoV) project

The ETC continues to deploy the RsoV project—a pilot mobile VHF radio solution that can offer secure communications in UN armoured vehicles operating in high-risk areas. The ETC is preparing 45 vehicles with RSoV kits on behalf of WFP, WHO, UNFPA, UNDSS, and OCHA, to be prepositioned in Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Odesa. 27 WFP vehicles are already prepared and the remaining vehicles are being pre-cabled and prepared for usage.

On 29 December—for the first time—the RSoV solution integrated into a truck was used during an inter-agency mission led by UNICEF to Toretsk, Donetsk oblast, which is very close to the frontline. System monitoring showed that the RSoV system was online for the whole duration of deployment. The mission up to frontline areas maintained a clear radio communication with the UNDSS SOC in Kyiv.

The ETC conducted a mission to Dnipro from 18 December to 22 December to deploy the second RSoV kit for WFP in Dnipro. The kit is now positioned and ready to use for

interagency convoys. The ETC also finalized the testing and standardization of RSoV cabling on Volvo and Renault trucks in Dnipro—WFP Logistics Cluster trucks were used for this exercise. The tests showed high performance of the RSoV solution with comprehensive VHF radio coverage. Further, the Wi-Fi coverage reached a radius of 150 metres around the truck with the RSoV solution.

Capacity building

In Kyiv, the ETC conducted a security communications training to 11 OCHA staff on 06 December.

In Dnipro, the cluster conducted two radio trainings for 49 UNHCR staff on 04 and 05 December.

In Odesa, the ETC team conducted three security communications trainings for WFP staff in Odesa and warehouse. In total, 41 staff received the training.

In collaboration with WHO, the cluster provided three briefing sessions on basic VHF radio usage to 54 staff from Ukrainian Scientific and Practical Centre of Emergency Medical Care and Disaster Medicine of the Ukrainian Ministry of Health on 07 December. This briefing is linked to the WHO project supporting the Ministry of Health to enhance the radio communications capabilities of the health workers.

Secure data connectivity

The ETC continues to support data connectivity services in the inter-agency hubs in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Lviv. 80 unique humanitarian workers used ETC internet connectivity services in these hubs in November.

Services for communities

The ETC finalized an 'Invincibility Points' project in Novyi Buh, Mykolaiv oblast, to support the affected population with internet connectivity. In 2022, Novyi Buh was close to the frontline and the local community is still struggling with basic connectivity needs. The ETC and the local Internet Service Provider (ISP) installed equipment for connectivity services for affected communities in eight locations (schools and community centres)—this was completed by 26 December ahead of the official opening of the service, which is pending signing of the agreement between WFP and local government authorities.

On 12 December, the ETC together with CLEAR Global and the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group conducted the last 'Plain Language' session of 2023, with a specific focus on Protection. A total of 21 participants attended, including one from a UN agency, 10 from international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and 10 from local NGOs. The 'Plain Language' approach is a communication workshop centered around clarity, aiming to assist humanitarians in connecting with affected individuals as effectively as possible.

In December, the cluster continued to collaborate with the UN Cash Working Group (CWG) and OCHA on the development of the Chatbot. The ETC developed the Terms of Reference (ToR) documents for procurement as well as the work plan and continues to engage closely with OCHA and the CWG focal point on the project development.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of service locations.

Funding

Funds received by the ETC in Ukraine in 2022 were utilized in 2023 for the completion of projects initiated in 2022.

Funding of US\$921,000 was received in May 2023 from the Government of Japan towards the cluster's 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.

On 22 December, an agreement was signed between WFP USA and WFP Rome HQ for the in-kind donation of equipment from ETC partner Cisco Crisis Response with a value of US\$500,000. This equipment is planned to secure the VHF radio backbone network in Ukraine.

Challenges

The security issues in recently opened areas in eastern Ukraine are impeding the deployment of telecommunications solutions.

The risk of cyber-attacks is considered high in the region.

Contacts

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www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict

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