



Norwegian Refugee Council's

## Country Programme in Ukraine

NRC established an initial presence in Ukraine in late 2014, with operations now centred in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts

### Our impact

Since becoming operational in eastern Ukraine, NRC has progressively expanded activities as concerns programme responses, core competencies and geographic reach in order to address evolving humanitarian needs.

The NRC strategy has focused on addressing the needs of internally displaced (IDPs) and conflict-affected communities, especially along the front-line (the so-called "contact-line") in Luhansk oblast and in the northern districts of Donetsk oblast of government-controlled area (GCA); these areas are locations with a very high concentration of IDPs. NRC has maintains field office/presence in Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk oblast) and at the Mayorsk entry/exit checkpoint (Donetsk oblast) in order to assist civilians in these front-line areas – including the

**From May to August 2017, NRC reached 22'000 individuals**

**with** information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA), shelter and non-food assistance (NFI), food security and livelihood assistance

Budget: 2017: 51 million NOK  
Donors: NMFA, UNHCR, ECHO, SIDA, WFP, Vatican City  
International staff: 9  
National staff: 103  
Established: 2014



thousands who travel regularly between GCA and NGCA (non-government controlled area) at the crossing points.

NRC provides basic support to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable conflict-affected population in GCA through cross-sectoral assistance and protection. With the relative stabilisation in communities away from the front-line and the reduction in intensity of the conflict in some localities, there is an evolution from mainly emergency towards early-recovery needs; consequently, since 2016 NRC has been implementing a range of activities to address such needs (livelihoods).

#### Humanitarian and political background

Despite three years of negotiations to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine, hostilities remain a fact of life for millions of people affected by the armed violence. Although efforts continue to implement the provisions of the Minsk II agreement established in February 2015 between the parties to the conflict, negotiations have yet to produce effective steps towards conflict resolution.

The situation along the contact-line in both Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts remains volatile. Despite an increase in violence during early 2017, during the period of May-August there were less ceasefire violations and civilian casualties along the contact-line, possibly attributable to a “harvest ceasefire” (which was not, though, fully implemented). Nevertheless, shelling continued to affect some localities, adding to the risks faced by the thousands of civilians living along the contact-line or crossing between GCA and NGCA. In parallel to this, mine/ERW contamination is a major concern in many areas and continues to be a serious threat to civilians in many contact-line communities.

The civilian population in eastern Ukraine continues to suffer from ongoing hostilities. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2017 estimates some 4.4 million people have been affected by the armed conflict, of whom some 4 million require humanitarian assistance (an increase of 200’000 persons since the start of 2017). Those deemed to be of most concern are the civilians living along both sides of the contact line. Many persons have fled the conflict area, within Ukraine and abroad; as of September 2017, some 1.59 million people are

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registered as internally displaced, consisting of 1'283'274 families from eastern Ukraine and Crimea (per the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine). Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 10'225 people have been killed, over 2'500 of which are civilians; 24'541 people have been wounded. Serious human rights concerns persist, according to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (August 2017).

The hostilities have generated significant humanitarian needs among displaced and resident communities alike. In many localities affected by hostilities – especially in frontline communities, basic life-supporting services have been disrupted; some civilians have limited access to income, little in the way of medicine, food, heating or money. The economy in eastern Ukraine has suffered from serious economic decline due to the conflict and ongoing economic reform efforts. Consumer prices have increased at a faster pace than many household incomes, thus negatively affecting purchasing power and access to life's necessities, especially for vulnerable groups already heavily impacted by the armed conflict.

Freedom of movement across the contact-line remains a major concern. On a daily basis, up to 36,000 civilians cross five available entry/exit checkpoints (EECPs) between GCA and NGCA (estimated at 1 million crossing per month during the summer of 2017) in order to maintain family ties, look after property, access markets, health care and social payments in GCA. Difficulties are linked to the destruction of infrastructure, but also because of a strict permit system, which has been put in place to cross between GCA and NGCA. Indeed, at those few crossing points open, civilians often stand in queues for hours in adverse weather while awaiting document checks. Additionally, due to ceasefire violations, localised hostilities sometimes force the closure of crossing points.

### **Humanitarian access**

Humanitarian access into NGCA remains a major issue of concern due to the numerous restrictions of the *de facto* authorities and of the Ukrainian government. A "registration" process imposed by the *de facto* authorities for international humanitarian

actors resulted in the suspension in late 2015 of most international agencies and their departure from Luhansk and Donetsk. As of the present, only very few international agencies have managed to acquire authorisation from the *de facto* authorities to operate in NGCA.

The Ukrainian government also has complicated procedures for allowing humanitarian agencies to operate in NGCA. The humanitarian community has continued to advocate on the need for multiple crossing points to NGCA, simplified, fast-track procedures for humanitarian cargo and clearer regulations for the movement of humanitarian personnel.

NRC established a full presence in NGCA (Luhansk city) in July 2015. However, a registration process was subsequently imposed on all international humanitarian actors by the *de facto* authorities (in Luhansk and Donetsk) and, in late September, almost all NGOs - including NRC - were informed that they were no longer authorised to operate. Since that time, NRC has submitted a series of requests to the *de facto* authorities to conduct humanitarian activities in NGCA. However, NRC has yet to receive a positive response to these authorisation requests. Despite this, NRC manages to address the legal needs of thousands of civilians from NGCA through a direct presence at the entry/exit checkpoint (EECP) in Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk oblast) and at the Mayorsk EECP (Donetsk oblast).

## NRC activities in the field

The situation in Ukraine remains volatile and of concern to the international community. With the needs of affected-communities being diverse, NRC has developed a holistic programme within the core competencies of ICLA, shelter/NFI and food security/livelihoods. This responds to needs both in the conflict and post-conflict areas. Due to the unstable situation, new and secondary displacements can take place; thus, NRC maintains the capacity to rapidly respond to evolving humanitarian needs. At the same time, NRC is working to mitigate the risk of protracted displacement and has begun to pursue approaches that offer durable solutions for the displaced and host communities; in this regard, NRC has launched projects aimed at meeting early-recovery needs in certain localities.

### Shelter and non-food assistance

The primary components of NRC's shelter programme include: emergency shelter and relief assistance (primarily non-food items (NFI)), recovery shelter, winterization and community infrastructure repairs. Shelter/NFI activities are mainly conducted in communities along the contact-line in Luhansk oblast (GCA). During the period of May-August 2017, 3'375 households (7'436 individuals) received NRC assistance to repair or reconstruct their homes; NRC shelter activities included:

- Provided 655 families (1'507 people) with construction materials and conditional cash to repair their damaged houses; this benefited 597 families for light and medium repair and 58 families for heavy repair work in 17 villages of Stanytsia Luhanska, Novoaidar and Popasna districts in Luhansk oblast. 447 families have already completed the repair work and live in their homes.
- Assisted 29 families (77 individuals), whose houses were destroyed by shelling, to fully rebuild their houses in seven villages near the contact-line in Stanytsia Luhanska and Popasna districts. Based on an owner driven approach, NRC provided construction materials and conditional cash grants to the households, while

the beneficiaries organise the reconstruction work themselves. Additionally, 10 extremely vulnerable families, which previously benefitted from NRC housing reconstruction, received basic household appliances or furniture.

NRC provided non-food items to the most vulnerable in frontline districts, including:

- Hygiene items for 100 families with newborn babies in 15 villages of Novoaidar and Stanytsia Luhanska districts;
- Hygiene kits to 295 extremely vulnerable families (554 individuals) such as internally displaced people (particularly non-registered ones) and families hosting displaced, families with low income, elderly, isolated communities in six villages of Novoaidar and Stanytsia Luhanska districts;
- 225 hygiene sets for families with bedridden or immobile individuals, benefitting to 467 people in 13 villages of three frontline districts.

Due to unmet WASH needs along the contact-line, NRC worked to improve the water infrastructure in Popasna district; NRC supplied equipment for the piped water systems in two towns, benefitting 2'045 families (4'487 individuals).

### Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

NRC's Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme aims to help displaced and conflicted-affected persons to exercise their rights and overcome legal obstacles through the provision of information, awareness-raising and legal counselling free of charge. Legal aid has been provided to communities across Luhansk and northern Donetsk oblasts through NRC Legal Aid Centres (in Severodonetsk, Stanytsia Luhanska, Kramatorsk and at the "Mayorsk" EECP), visits to the State Emergency Service Transition Centre in Severodonetsk, mobile teams of lawyers, home visits to the elderly and to people with disabilities, group information sessions and a telephone hotline.

In total, from May until August 2017, across eastern Ukraine, NRC ICLA provided information services to 2'675 beneficiaries through 197 group information

sessions, legal counselling to 2'767 people and legal assistance to 201 individuals; additionally, 173 people – mainly representatives of authorities and civil society – participated in ICLA trainings on IDP rights. ICLA lawyers provide legal information at the entrance/exit checkpoints in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. To meet the high demand for legal information, a new Legal Aid Centre was opened in early 2017 at the "Mayorsk" EECF between GCA and NGCA; it is operated by the Regional Secondary Free Legal Aid Centre in cooperation with NRC.

To address legal barriers affecting IDPs, NRC coordinates closely with the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories (TOT) and IDPs, Military-Civil Administrations, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Justice, Migration Service, the Pension Fund and the Custody and Guardianship Service; cooperation is also pursued with local organizations, international NGOs and UN agencies.

There is a range of problems that remain of significant concern for internally displaced and conflict-affected people: suspension of IDP social benefits and pensions; problematic aspects of IDP registration linked to changes in legislation and in procedures for granting (restoring) IDP social benefits; control checks of displaced at places of residence; verification/identification of IDP pensioners at the State Savings Bank (*Oschadbank*) to receive their pensions; inheritance registration procedures; certain aspects of the procedure for obtaining/restoration of lost or damaged/destroyed civil documentation; and the lack of compensatory mechanisms for damaged /destroyed or occupied property.

NRC has contributed to positive outcomes vis-à-vis several legal issues: the case of an unaccompanied minor without identity documents who arrived from NGCA and gave birth to a child in Kramatorsk hospital. With NRC's assistance, the young mother received all required documents, such as a passport, tax ID, IDP certificate, as well as a certificate of her mother's death. This case was pursued through joint legal assistance and court representation by NRC and Secondary Legal Aid Centre lawyers. This was an example of a case where NRC was able to assist an IDP in resolving several legal barriers: (1) acquire new civil documentation, (2) complete inheritance

procedures, (3) register ownership rights and (4) defend the right to monthly targeted assistance.

During the period of May through August 2017, NRC organized a series of seminars, round-tables and trainings:

- Jointly with the Department of Justice in Luhansk oblast, the seminar "Access to justice: practical aspects of protection of social rights of IDPs and conflict-affected population" was held in Severodonetsk for 29 legal officers of territorial bodies of ministries and other central executive authorities, public enterprises, institutions and organisations.
- Jointly with the Department of Justice of Donetsk oblast, the training "International standards for protection of rights and freedoms of internally displaced people and conflict-affected population" was organised in Sviatohirsk for 25 Justice Department's employees.
- Jointly with the NGO Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), the training "International standards of human rights protection: HLP rights of conflict-affected population in East of Ukraine" was organised in Sviatohirsk for 20 NRC and Free Secondary Legal Aid Centres' lawyers.
- The training "Providing primary legal aid by local authorities to internally displaced and conflict affected people in eastern Ukraine along the contact-line" was held in Severodonetsk for 20 heads of local and state executive authorities from the front-line district of Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk oblast).
- Jointly with the Council of the Bar of Odesa region, the training "Legal assistance to internally displaced people: legal framework and judicial practice" was organised for 25 attorneys from Kyiv, Odesa, Cherkasy, Kherson, Poltava and Chornomorsk, aimed at improving the quality of legal assistance provided to IDPs.
- The training "The standards of international humanitarian law; national legislation protecting the rights of internally displaced and population affected by the conflict in eastern Ukraine" was organised in front-line Shchastia for 25 representatives of local and international NGOs;
- The training "Access to justice: judicial practice and legislation on protection rights of internally displaced and conflict affected population" was

held in Severodonetsk for 22 legal officers of territorial bodies of ministries and other central executive authorities, public enterprises, institutions and organisations.

- Jointly with representatives of Court of Appeal of Luhansk oblast and the Territorial Department of Justice of Luhansk oblast, the training "Secondary legal aid for internally displaced people and conflict-affected population: judicial practice and legal framework" was conducted in Kreminna (Luhansk oblast) for 23 legal officers and attorneys of State Free Secondary Legal Aid Centres of Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts.
- Jointly with representatives of State Migration Service, local authorities and I/NGOs, 2 round-tables entitled "Passport documentation, registration of residence for internally displaced and people, residing in NGCA" were organised in Severodonetsk and Kramatorsk respectively.
- Round-tables on the protection of IDP rights with representatives of state bodies, NGOs and Free Legal Aid Centres were conducted in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.

NRC staff conducted 103 bi-/multi-lateral meetings with representatives of executive, judicial and legislative authorities, educational institutions, civil society and international community, participated in 19 working groups, meetings and similar events.

NRC continued its advocacy efforts on the issue of provision of payments and pensions for IDPs and pensioners residing in NGCA; developing mechanism for compensation of housing damaged or destroyed during hostilities. To support such efforts, several publications were developed: Briefing Notes "New rules of pension provision discriminate against IDPs with disabilities" and "People in eastern Ukraine: without housing and compensation"; a Legal Brief/Case Study "Petrova" on existing judicial practice for compensation of destroyed property; and the Case Study "Social housing solutions for IDPs and conflict-affected population: comparative analysis of Bakhmut, Slovyansk and Kramatorsk projects." Together with other national and international actors, NRC contributed to the report "Foreign experience of housing solutions and compensation for destroyed/damaged housing for IDPs;" it provides an analysis of the relevant experience of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Cyprus, Georgia, Moldova and Serbia and recommendations for Ukraine.

As part of its efforts vis-à-vis housing, land and property rights (HLP), NRC continued to lead the HLP Technical Working Group (TWG), which brings together members of the Protection and Shelter Clusters at meetings in Kyiv, Severodonetsk and Kramatorsk. Through NRC's support to the TWG, a successful advocacy campaign concerning housing solutions for IDPs and conflict-affected population resulted in the Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories and IDPs abandoning the concept of limited housing solutions for targeted groups of IDPs in favour of a broader comprehensive approach to durable housing solutions. Additionally, the Ministry of Regional Development issued an explanatory note exempting prior legislation approvals for construction and reconstruction of housing damaged or destroyed as a result of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, thereby facilitating humanitarian activities.

In June 2017, NRC organised a series of events for children residing in the areas close to the contact-line in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and public events dedicated to the International Children's Day. Some 950 children of different age participated in activities on raising legal awareness.

In order to strengthen legal information activities, NRC issued three new booklets (ICLA leaflet, "How to obtain passport first, recover or replace lost or damaged passport and taxpayer ID card", "Granting and resumption of monthly payment") and 2 "Roadmaps for IDPs" in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.

ICLA continued to work with its strategic partner - the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) - on addressing systemic issues of concern for IDPs and conflict-affected communities in eastern Ukraine. Cooperation has been extended beyond the implementation of strategic litigation activities to include capacity building for ICLA staff and Free Secondary Legal Aid Centre lawyers, as well as to advocacy on pensions and HLP issues.

### Food security / livelihoods

The ongoing violence and displacement has severely affected the agricultural sector, both smallholder farmers and major farming enterprises in eastern Ukraine. Currently, food access remains a significant concern in conflict-affected areas, especially along the contact-line. An Inter-Agency Vulnerability Assessment (IAVA) (September 2016) revealed that

communities living near the contact-line as well as internally displaced in rural locations have less access to food, income, markets, livelihoods, land and security of tenure. According to the latest assessments conducted in mid-2017 by the Food Security Cluster (FSC), the total number of food insecure people in eastern Ukraine has increased by up to 15%. The situation calls for more interventions in order to restore agricultural productive capacity and to support communities to rehabilitate assets for sustained food production and/or income generation.

NRC food security and livelihood programme aims to restore agricultural productive capacity and sustainable livelihoods, improve access to agricultural markets by communities living along the contact-line in Luhansk oblast, and strengthen capacity of local organisations to support livelihoods and food security activities. Overall, during the period of May--August 2017, NRC assisted 8'738 individuals through its food security and livelihood activities. In particular, 1'877 households received conditional cash for the purchase of agricultural supplies. The households chose inputs they want to purchase from the market based on their individual agricultural activities. NRC also distributed 8,000 laying hens to 200 households living along the contact-line. This activity will help households generate income, as well as provide help to improve household dietary diversity. NRC also supplied front-line communities of with 1.5MT of fish to support local ponds; this support to some 205 households will help to generate income, as well as provide protein rich food for the most vulnerable individuals.

NRC registered 555 families for Food for Assets (FFA) and 300 households for Food for Training (FFT) in Luhansk oblast. The main focus of the FFA component is on assisting the most vulnerable and food insecure households and communities, residing along the contact-line, to use their labour to build assets and restore infrastructure necessary for sustained self-reliance; specific activities focus on repairing infrastructure, such as greenhouses, orchards, roads, piped water systems as well as clearing of land for agricultural activities. Through this project, selected vulnerable families are receiving a payment of USD 66 per household, which

is enough for the purchase of monthly food supplies. The FFT component is being implemented through public service skills training at vocational institutions; trainees will receive government recognised certificates at the end of the 3-6 months training. The courses selected by the beneficiaries include hairdressing, dressmaking, machine operation, building/bricklaying and manicure/pedicure. Graduates will be able to use the acquired skills to find regular employment or to start their own income-generating activities. During the period of May — August, a total of 885 benefitted from financial support within these two project components (FFA/FFT).

NRC is also promoting small business development, contributing to the economic recovery in Luhansk oblast. NRC conducted 13 business development training sessions for 318 entrepreneurs, mostly IDPs and some host families. Subsequently, these trained entrepreneurs submitted grant applications for small business development activities. Through this project, selected entrepreneurs will receive cash grants of up to USD 1000 for small business development activities. In addition to financial support, the entrepreneurs are also receiving legal assistance on business registration and taxation.

NRC supported isolated communities in Popasna district (Zolote) to improve their household economic security through the distribution of hand presses and electric shredders to 18 families (52 family members). With this equipment, the families can produce biomass fuel briquette from organic waste/residual material and conserve financial resources, rather than buying costly solid fuel.