Ukraine

ETC Situation Report #2
Reporting period: 09/03/2022 to 16/03/2022

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster was activated in Ukraine on 3 March 2022 following the dramatic escalation of armed conlict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation beginning on 24 February. An ETC coordinator is on the ground in Poland where equipment is being prepositioned in preparation for deployment in Ukraine.

Highlights

- Following an assessment that was conducted from 10-12 March in Lviv by a WFP FITTEST Telecommunications Specialist, the ETC is preparing to install a VHF repeater in the city as a back-up security communications system for humanitarians.

- Two members of the ETC team on the ground in Krakow, Poland, were trained on the use of the GATR and RANGER rapidly deployable VSAT solutions by emergency.lu staff who flew in to conduct the training on 15 March.

- The use of the ETC Chatbot to provide coordinated communications between humanitarians and the affected community has been endorsed by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group. The ETC is engaging with the Protection Cluster to develop Ukrainian language content for
the Chatbot.

A trainer from emergency.lu instructs an ETC telecommunications specialist on the use of the GATR VSAT.

Photo Credit: Claire Roach, ETC

General Situation and Context

Three weeks after the escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, intense fighting continues across major cities throughout Ukraine, including Kharkhiv, Kherson, Odessa, and the capital, Kyiv, as well as in the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk.

According to UNHCR, more than 3 million people have fled across international borders into neighbouring countries. The latest refugee and displacement figures are available here, updated several times per day: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

Damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure in areas of active fighting and those affected by airstrikes and shelling continue to impede people's access to water, food, healthcare, and other basic services. This is also impacting the ability of partners to scale-up and expand programmes inside Ukraine.

Impacts on telecommunications

Telecommunications infrastructure remains operational throughout most of Ukraine. However, there are reports of hacking and jamming of telecommunications means in the country and localised outages in areas of heavy fighting. Although reports of 3G and 4G mobile network coverage are positive along the Ukrainian borders, there are signs of saturation of the network due to the influx of refugees.

Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have enabled national roaming inside Ukraine, allowing users to connect to another carrier's network free of charge if their own is not available. In Poland and Moldova, MNOs are providing free SIM cards to refugees. MNOs and the European Telecommunications Network Operators (ETNO) Association have also waived roaming charges in the neighbouring countries and have made free access to airtime available as part of their support to the Ukraine crisis.

ETNO is compiling updates from its members here on their support to the affected population: https://etno.eu/news/all-news/8-news/727-telcos-ukraine.html

Activities

Coordination

The first meeting of the ETC-chaired ICT Working Group was held on 17 March and was attended by ICT staff from Cisco, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Telecoms Sans Frontieres (TSF), UNDSS, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, and WHO. The Working Group was established to allow organisations operating inside Ukraine to share information on the ICT and Telecommunications needs of the current emergency response.

The ETC coordinator is engaging with partner organisations on the ground in Krakow and is coordinating with the UNHCR's Refugee Emergency Telecommunications Sector (RETS) on its response in the neighbouring countries. The RETS is coordinating the response for the communications needs of Ukrainian refugees and humanitarians in the neighbouring countries.

ETC activities

A Telecommunications Specialist from WFP's Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency Support Team (FITTEST) conducted an assessment in Lviv, Ukraine, from 10-12 March to identify the requirements for the establishment of interagency telecommunications services in the city.

Following the assessment, the ETC is planning to establish a VHF radio network in Lviv to serve as a back-up security communications system for humanitarians operating in the city. There are currently approximately 50 humanitarians, from OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, and WHO operating in Lviv that would benefit from the services.

A shipment of telecommunications equipment from the WFP FITTEST warehouse in Dubai was cleared from customs and received in the warehouse in Rzeszow, Poland on 13 March. The shipment included equipment to establish a Security Operations Centre (SOC) in one location, including a VHF repeater. On 16 March, the repeater was programmed and prepared for deployment to Lviv.

Emergency.lu sent two VSATs to be prepositioned at the logistics cluster warehouse in Rzeszow, Poland, prior to their deployment in Ukraine. On 15 March, two staff from emergency.lu travelled to Poland to train the ETC team on the use of the GATR and RANGER rapidly deployable VSAT solutions. Following the training, the ETC now has two IT and Telecommunications specialists on the ground in Poland that are able to deploy the VSATs, which will be used to provide connectivity to humanitarians in Ukraine.

Additional equipment was received at the warehouse for user management and registration, as well as access points to distribute the Internet connection to be provided by the emergency.lu VSAT equipment. The ETC is engaging with its partner Cisco Crisis Response to establish additional layers of security for the secure deployment of the emergency.lu data connectivity systems.

Services for Communities

The Global ETC gathered initial information on the information needs of the affected population through a series of Key Informant Interviews which were conducted from 3-5 March. The report, available to users with an account on the ETC website, was updated with input from Global ETC partners CDAC Network, Internews, GSMA, and REACH. Based on Key Informant Interviews, it was found that access to internet, mobile network coverage, and connectivity is reliable in most of Ukraine except in areas of heavy fighting. The interviewees reported a high need for power banks to allow the use of mobile devices while sheltering for extended periods of time from the fighting.

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group has endorsed the use of the ETC Chatbot as a means of providing coordinated information on behalf of the clusters. The Chatbot, which has already been deployed in Libya and Iraq, can serve as a channel for humanitarians to disseminate key messages to the affected population and direct them to available services. The Global ETC is engaging with the Protection cluster on developing Ukrainian language content for the Chatbot.

Additional activities

Cisco Crisis Response has staff present in Krakow, Poland and is engaging with UNHCR and other NGOs to provide equipment in support of their operations in Ukraine and the surrounding countries.

NetHope has deployed a team to Moldova to assess 25 sites for connectivity, ICT and cyber security services.

A team from Telecoms Sans Frontieres arrived in Lviv on 16 March. The team will support humanitarian responders active in areas close to the conflict zones with satellite connectivity solutions.

Funding

The United States contributed US $1 million to support the ETC operation in Ukraine.

Together with the US $400,000 received from CERF, the ETC is 48% funded out of the US$ 2.9 million required to support 3 common operational locations with security communications, Security Operational Centres set-up, data connectivity, and helpdesk services in Ukraine for six months.

Challenges

Security and access is expected to be a major constraint in the ETC's ability to implement telecommunications solutions within Ukraine.

There is expected to be a high risk of cyber threats in this response.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the Ukraine response will take place on **25 March 2022 at 13:00 UTC**.

Contacts

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

https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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