Ukraine – conflict

ETC Situation Report #32
Reporting period: 01/02/2024 to 29/02/2024

Highlights

- In cooperation with the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), the ETC prepared a survey that will be shared with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Ukraine to map their operational locations, equipment, and technical staff able to support the usage of a security communications system. Currently, the ETC only provides security communications services for UN agencies. A total of 13 NGOs have expressed their interest in connecting to the security communications network supported by the ETC.

The ETC delivers a presentation on security communications systems during SSAFE training. Photo: WFP/ETC

- The ETC is extending the VHF radio network to an additional eight sites—Kehychivka, Kropyvnytskyi, Mykolaiv, Orly, Pokrovsk, Poltava, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia. The ETC received technical assessments from BRT for seven out of eight sites. Three sites—Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Kropyvnytskyi—were visited by the ETC in February for the technical survey to agree with BRT on technical details for the installation of the VHF equipment.

- The ETC developed an automated platform for humanitarians (via a focal point) to book security communications trainings. The bookings are divided by the east, west, south, and central Ukraine regions. To reach the booking platform, use this link.

Overview

This month marks two years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022. Ongoing shelling, persistent missile attacks and widespread destruction continue to cause extensive devastation to lives, livelihoods, civilian infrastructure, and has resulted in a substantial increase in humanitarian needs.

Since the commencement of the large-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the toll has exceeded 30,457 civilian casualties. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) the number of civilian casualties in December 2023 rose 37 percent compared with November 2023 due to intensified attacks with missile

and loitering munitions. 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 6.5 million as of 23 February 2024.

Impact on telecommunications

Continuing reports highlight significant disturbances to mobile and satellite telephony services in regions close to the frontlines.

Amid the escalating conflict, cyberattacks persist with varying impacts, affecting service availability in some cases, and targeting the unauthorized release of data in others.

ETC Activities

Coordination

In cooperation with the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), the ETC prepared a survey that was shared on 29 February with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Ukraine to map their operational locations, equipment, and technical staff able to support the usage of a security communications system. Currently, the ETC only provides security communications services for UN agencies. A total of 13 NGOs have expressed their interest in connecting to the security communications network supported by the ETC.

The ETC supported the development of a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the UNDSS-managed Security Information and Operations Centre (SIOC) in Kyiv. The SOPs aim to standardize communication with the SIOC, including for staff radio checks and staff on mission members using different communication means. UNDSS plans to endorse the SOP with the Security Cell and Security Management Team (SMT).

Security communications (radio)

VHF radio network

The ETC continues 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 areas closer to frontlines.

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In February, the cluster received all the donated network equipment as part of the Cisco Crisis Response grant. With the support of Cisco Crisis Response, the ETC plans to deploy and configure the received equipment and licences in March to enhance the security of the VHF network data connectivity backbone in the Ukraine operation.

Radio programming

Radio programming activities conducted in February are as follows:

- Dnipro: Six VHF mobile radios for WHO and six handheld radios for WFP;
- Kyiv: 23 handheld and 41 mobile radios for OHCHR, UNDSS, and WHO.

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

Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) project

The ETC continues to deploy the RSoV project—a pilot mobile VHF radio solution that offers secure communications in UN armoured vehicles operating in high-risk areas.

There are currently five operational RSoV kits prepositioned in Dnipro, Kyiv, and Odesa. Since December 2023, all five humanitarian convoy missions going to the frontline to deliver aid using trucks have been equipped with the RSoV solution to ensure responders have access to security communications with the UNDSS-managed SIOC.

In February, the team reconfigured one malfunctioning RSoV kit, so Odesa now has two operational kits—one for armored vehicles (AVs) and another for Logistic Cluster trucks for the inter-agency convoys.

Capacity building

The ETC developed an automated platform for humanitarians (via a focal point) to book security communications trainings. The bookings are divided by the east, west, south, and central Ukraine regions. To reach the booking platform, use this link.

The cluster received confirmation regarding the Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} training being held in Ukraine in 2024. The preliminary dates chosen are 13 to 17 May with the objectives of this in-person workshop to build capacity in Ukraine and provide in-depth induction into UN Security Communication Systems to technical UN personnel.

The team in Dnipro conducted a security communications training for five UN Women staff on 28 February.

Secure data connectivity

The ETC continues to support data connectivity services in the inter-agency hubs in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Lviv. 83 humanitarians used ETC internet connectivity services in these hubs in February.

The ETC remains committed to safeguarding its connectivity services and employs advanced firewall protection implemented in collaboration with partner Cisco.

Services for communities

'Invincibility Points' project

ETC internet services are being provided in eight community institutions in Novyi Buh in Mykolaiv, southern Ukraine, including kindergartens, schools, and medical centres as part of

a framework to improve the socio-economic situation in the conflict zone. The new internet services in Novyi Buh were operational as of early January for an initial six-month pilot phase.

Following positive feedback from the local authorities, the ETC plans to expand the pilot project to the entire territory of the Mykolaiv region as well as Kharkiv. The cluster is planning assessment missions for these expanded locations.

Inter-agency chatbot

In August 2023, the humanitarian Cash Working Group (CWG) requested the ETC to support with the creation of a Chatbot as a communication tool with affected communities in Ukraine to enhance information dissemination about Humanitarian Multipurpose Cash Assistance (MPCA). The procurement process for the development of the Inter-Agency Chatbot for the CWG is ongoing. In February, three Long Term Agreement (LTA) partners were invited to submit their proposals for implementation of the project. Two applicants sent their project proposals, which are currently being assessed.

Dashboard

See the ETC Dashboard for an overview of service locations.

Funding

In 2024, the ETC in Ukraine has a budget requirement of US$1.5 million to continue to deliver vital communications services. At the start of 2024, the ETC is 73% funded out of this total – with US$1.1 million balance of available funds from 2023.

Funds received by the ETC in 2023 were carried over to complete critical projects, including US$921,000 received in May 2023 from the Government of Japan and a US$500,000 in-kind equipment donation received in February 2024 from Cisco Crisis Response to secure the VHF radio backbone network in Ukraine.

Challenges

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

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

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www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict

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