

## Ukraine – conflict

### ETC Situation Report #33

Reporting period: 01/03/2024 to 31/03/2024

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

- March 2024 marked 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, and civilian infrastructure and have resulted in a substantial increase in humanitarian needs.
- On 28 March, in response to an urgent request from OCHA, the ETC provided temporary internet connectivity services for registration points and tents in Odesa opened by the local authorities for support to people affected by the intensified shelling. The ETC used its existing Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) and satellite solutions to deliver the services.
- In March, the ETC supported UNHCR with technical guidance to build their capacity with RSoV—UNHCR now has two RSoV kits and is using them for their missions to the frontlines. RSoV is a pilot mobile VHF radio project that offers secure communications in UN armoured vehicles operating in high-risk areas.



People affected by the intensified shelling in Odesa were registered using temporary ETC internet services urgently requested by OCHA. Photo: WFP/ETC

## Overview

March 2024 marked 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, and civilian infrastructure and have resulted in a substantial increase in humanitarian needs.

During March 2024, attacks on critical infrastructure became more frequent. According to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\) Flash Updates](#), as of 22 March, hundreds of thousands of people in Ukraine were left without power and water, notably in Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih, and Odesa. Civilian casualties were reported; homes and schools were damaged. On 22 March, Ukraine's energy system faced its largest attack of the year, affecting multiple regions. Dnipro Hydroelectric Plant in Zaporizhzhia city is critically damaged; oil leaks and soil contamination are present.

The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) reports that approximately 3.7 million people have become internally displaced in Ukraine. According to the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) Ukraine Situation Flash Update, as of 14 March, approximately 6.5 million refugees from Ukraine are recorded globally.

### Impact on telecommunications

Continuing reports highlight significant disturbances to mobile and satellite telephony services in regions close to the frontlines. In many regions throughout the country, the situation with electricity supply is worsening.

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 Organization (INSO), the ETC further surveyed the 13 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who previously expressed interest in joining the ETC Security Communications System (SCS) service. The ETC continues to engage with UNDSS and INSO to gather more data on NGO needs.

The ETC collaborated with UNDSS to develop a new Communication Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), emphasizing standardization with the Security Information and Operations Centre (SIOC) and convoy members. The SOP is now under review by the Security Cell and then will be submitted to the Security Management Team (SMT) for endorsement.

### Security communications (radio)

#### VHF radio network

The ETC signed a contract with the Ukrainian Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT) on 13 March and initiated plans for VHF antenna deployment at eight new sites<sup>1</sup>. The expansion aims to enhance and provide security communications services in areas closer to frontlines. The initiative was already deployed in five sites in 2023<sup>2</sup>. In March, the ETC conducted technical assessments in Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Pokrovsk with the BRT technical team.

Between 16 to 22 March, many sites hosting BRT towers were damaged by air attacks. Despite these challenges, the ETC continued collaborating with BRT to arrange installations at planned sites including assessing secondary sites.

On March 18, a back-up VHF repeater was installed in the common operational area of Dnipro as part of the wider initiative to strengthen the service across Ukraine. This repeater

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<sup>1</sup> Kehychivka, Kropyvnytskyi, Mykolaiv, Orly, Pokrovsk, Poltava, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia

<sup>2</sup> VHF radio coverage was significantly scaled up to provide secure communications services beyond the common operational areas of Kyiv, Odesa, Dnipro, and Lviv to key locations close to the frontline in Kramatorsk, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Luch and Kherson.

can be switched on to provide VHF radio services in the case that the main repeater on the BRT tower no longer functions, or during any technical or security incidents.

The ETC made considerable progress in testing and deploying network equipment donated by Cisco Crisis Response to support and secure the VHF radio network in Ukraine. This included finalizing the testing of Cisco Meraki equipment and initiating the deployment of Cisco firewalls at strategic locations. The equipment has been deployed in the UNDSS-managed primary SIOC in Kyiv and back-up Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) in Lviv, where five remote sites in Odesa, Mykolaiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Kramatorsk are planned to be migrated with Cisco Meraki firewalls during April.

### **Radio programming**

Radio programming was carried out during March—19 handheld VHF radios were programmed for WFP (4), UNODC (1), and FAO (14); nine mobile radios were programmed for UNDP (6) and WHO (3).

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

### **Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) project**

Technical support is provided to several UN agencies in their assessment and installation of the Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) solution—a pilot mobile VHF radio project 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 inter-agency convoy missions going to the frontline to deliver aid using Logistics Cluster trucks have been equipped with the RSoV solution to ensure responders have access to security communications with the UNDSS-managed SIOC.

In March, the ETC supported UNHCR with technical guidance to build their capacity with RSoV—UNHCR now has two RSoV kits and is using them for their missions to the frontlines.

The ETC is supporting UNFPA with technical guidance to build their RSoV kit—UNFPA is planning to have one kit operating for their missions to the frontlines.

### **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 ETC is organizing two Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} training sessions in Ukraine to take place from 13 to 17 May and from 20 to 24 May. A survey was conducted to identify interest among UN agencies and NGOs, resulting in 36 applications from 12 UN agencies. Participant selection has been finalized.

In March, the ETC conducted basic SCS training sessions for users:

- UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) staff in Kyiv with seven participants and two participants from UNODC. WFP staff in Kyiv with six participants.

- OCHA staff in Lviv with seven participants.
- WFP staff in Kropyvnytskyi with six participants.

### Secure data connectivity

The ETC continues to support data connectivity services in the inter-agency hubs in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Lviv. 75 humanitarians used ETC internet connectivity services in these hubs in March.

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

### Services for communities

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 and to enable communities to access critical information and communicate with relatives. The 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 is now working to expand the above pilot project to the wider Mykolaiv region as well as possibly Kharkiv. The cluster is planning assessment missions for these expanded locations in April to understand existing gaps and plan for the service provision.

On 28 March, in response to an urgent request from OCHA, the ETC set up temporary internet connectivity services for registration points and tents in Odesa opened by the local authorities for support to people affected by intensified shelling. The ETC used its existing RSoV and satellite solutions to deliver the services. By 29 March, all community members were registered using the new network.

## 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 a 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 escalating of security situation in eastern and southern hampers ETC efforts to expand VHF network.

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

## Contacts

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

[www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict](http://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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