FLASH UPDATE  (17 May 2023)

UKRAINE: DETERIORATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN THE FRONT-LINE AREAS OF DONETSKA OBLAST

Flash Update No.4: Lyman

As of 16 May 2023

HIGHLIGHTS

- Due to intensified hostilities, humanitarian needs in the front-line Lymanska hromada of Donetska oblast in the east of Ukraine remain high, with decimated medical services, suspended in-person education, disrupted connectivity and limited food stock in local shops.
- Only a fraction of the 13,000 people remaining in the hromada have access to piped water, gas and electricity.
- Despite challenges caused by the security situation, limited humanitarian access to Lymanska hromada resumed in October 2022. Since the start of 2023, humanitarians have sent four inter-agency convoys to support nearly 10,000 people in the hard-to-reach areas of this war-torn community.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The humanitarian situation in the front-line Lymanska hromada of the eastern Donetska oblast remains difficult, according to humanitarian partners and local authorities, hostilities have reportedly further intensified since the start of the year.

Lymanska hromada consists of 38 towns and villages. Its population decreased more than threefold from pre-war 43,000 to an estimated 13,000 people, including at least 600 children, 5,000 older people and about 300 people with disabilities, according to partners on the ground. The population of Lyman town – the administrative centre of the hromada, which is 20 kilometres from the front line in the north of Donetska oblast – is now estimated at 7,000 people, up from 5,000 in October 2022 when it was retaken by the Government of Ukraine and still a third of pre-war estimates. According to the international NGO REACH assessments and local authorities’ reports, around 100 people displaced from other areas currently live in the hromada. Before February 2022, Lymanska hromada hosted over 20,000 internally displaced people.

Nearly 85 per cent of the buildings in the hromada were destroyed when Ukraine's Government regained control of the area in October 2022, according to the assessment conducted by REACH. Gas and electricity supply was largely disrupted due to severe infrastructure damage. Some villages, including Yampil, have been entirely disconnected from electricity, water supply and telecommunications since April 2022. And while the local authorities have reported that restoration works are ongoing, only 40 per cent of the consumers have electricity in the hromada (60 per cent in Lyman town), and only 10 per cent have access to gas. With only 20 per cent of the houses in Lyman town connected to piped water supply, most people use wells and outdoor pumps to obtain drinking water. Water supply is also one of the main challenges for some 900 residents of the five surrounding villages, which primarily rely on water trucking organized by the municipality.

Access to health care in the hromada is limited, with only one functional 40-bed hospital and a few primary health-care facilities. A medical point managed by a nurse is functional in Yampil village, and a medical consultant operates a similar medical point in Novoselivka village — both around 15 kilometres from Lyman town. One pharmacy has recently reopened in Lyman town, according to partners on the ground.
Market access is decimated, and only a few shops, including one in Yampil, stock essential food and basic items but at high prices. There are five ATMs and two bank branches in the hromada. A public bus also takes people to a bank in Kramatorsk – 40 kilometres away – where residents can access additional services. With no post offices in remote villages, a mobile team of the national postal service Ukrposhta delivers pension allowances for their residents in cash once a month.

All schools in the hromada have been closed since February 2022, and all education has moved online. However, as mobile and Internet coverage is only partially available across the hromada, access to education has been severely impacted. According to local authorities, repair works to restore communications in the area are ongoing.

The deterioration of the situation has caused many people to rely fully or partially on humanitarian assistance in the past months. Most critical needs include food, water, hygiene supplies, repair and construction materials, firewood stoves and gas containers, solar lamps, power banks, power generators, jerrycans and other essential household items. Additionally, people are short of bed sheets, mattresses and clothing. Medication, including to treat cardiac and blood pressure ailments, is needed to address health-care needs, especially for older people.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Despite challenges due to the security situation, limited humanitarian access has resumed since October 2022. Humanitarians continue mobilizing efforts to support the people in Lymanska hromada with essential supplies.

Since the start of 2023, humanitarians have sent four inter-agency convoys with 18 truckloads of humanitarian aid to support nearly 10,000 people in the hard-to-reach areas of Lymanska hromada. The first inter-agency humanitarian convoy in 2023 reached Lymanska hromada on 16 February. International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO) provided some 100 tons of humanitarian aid to nearly 3,000 people in areas around Lyman, Siversk and Sloviansk in Donetsk oblast, including food, hygiene supplies, warm clothes, household items, wood heating ovens, solar lamps, tarpaulin and plastic sheets to repair houses. Local partners carried out the last-mile delivery and distribution of supplies. Since then, three more inter-agency convoys brought life-saving assistance once a month to those who have remained in and around Lyman. The most recent one, on 12 May, delivered aid to the 600 residents of severely impacted Yampil village, including emergency shelter and construction materials for 100 families, tarpaulin sheets for 300 families, household kits for 200 families, 600 solar lamps and jerrycans, 500 food parcels enough for the remaining population of the village for a month, medications, hygiene kits for 200 families provided by IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and WFP. Non-governmental organizations Slavic Heart and ADRA conducted the last-mile delivery of humanitarian aid with the support of local authorities. Overall, in 2023, humanitarians provided vital assistance to about 120,000 people in Donetsk oblast through inter-agency convoys – out of 1.5 million people estimated to need help on both sides of the front line in the oblast.

To support pressing needs, the international NGO People in Need (PIN) opened three social laundries in Lyman town in April, equipped with washing machines and tumble dryers. PIN also distributed bottled water, however, such support is not regular due to security risks. Médecins Sans Frontières operates mobile clinics across the hromada and a stationary medical container in Yampil village that offers medical consultations. IOM provides limited cash assistance in remote villages of the hromada, such as Yampil.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has provided livelihood assistance and support to boost food production in the areas around Lyman with the help of a national NGO – the Eastern Ukrainian Agricultural Department of the Service. In April, FAO distributed spring barley seeds to three farmers, two tons each, selected based on their applications to the State
Agrarian Registry and recommendations of local authorities in areas reportedly safe from mine contamination. This allowed the farmers to sow ten hectares of land, expecting a harvest of 45 tons of grain by July 2023.

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