

Ukraine Needs Assessment

– a multi-sectoral look at areas close to or beyond frontline

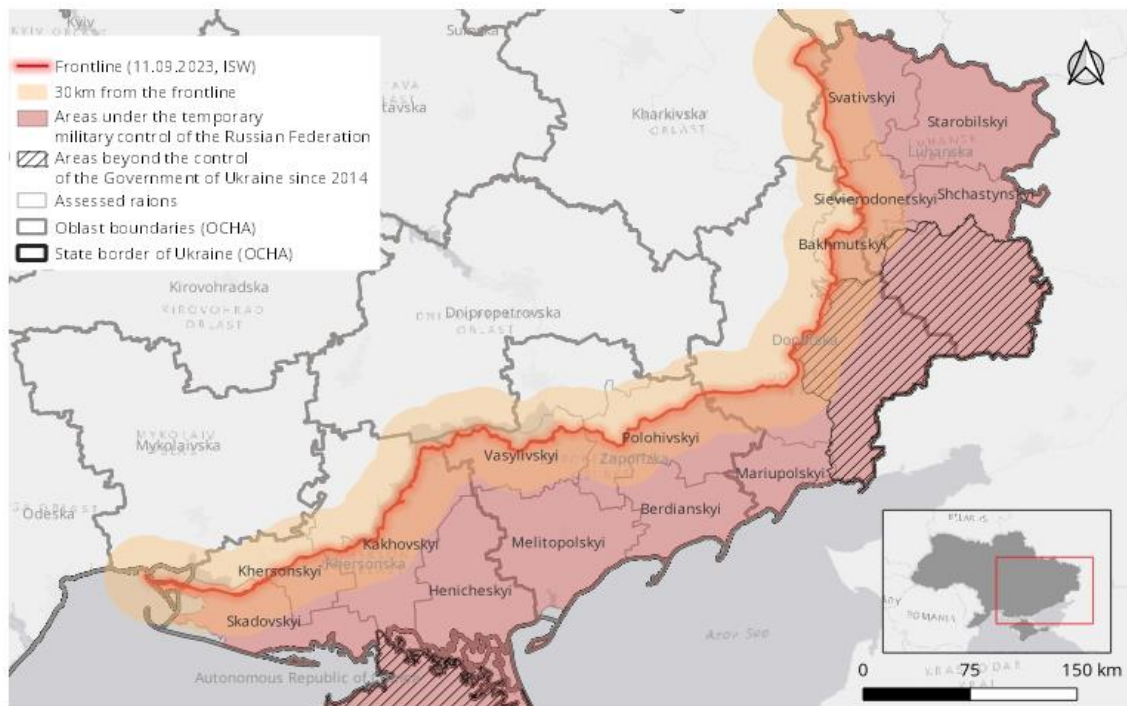


Brief – February 2024

Background

The escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 led to massive waves of displacement inside the country and a large outflux of refugees across its borders. As of September 2023,¹ 3.7 million people remained displaced inside Ukraine while 6.3 million people were refugees as of December 2023². As of September 2023, the frontline³ stretched for over 1200km, with approximately 18 percent⁴ of the country's area beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine. The war has created large-scale humanitarian needs. The humanitarian situation close to and beyond the frontline is of particular concern due to the persistent security threats and access constraints that both drive needs and impact the ability for humanitarian actors to respond.

This brief is done within the frames of the Ukraine Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) 2023. The MSNA is a broad multisectoral assessment, requested by the Humanitarian Country Team and led by REACH in partnership with WFP, which aims to build an evidence-base for improved humanitarian programming⁵. The brief presents summarised assessment findings from areas of the country that were inaccessible for direct data collection, e.g. areas close to and beyond the frontline. This includes areas currently not under the control of the Government of Ukraine, i.e. occupied by the Russian Federation, with the exception of areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine since 2014. In these areas, interviews with residents are not an option. Instead, the so-called Area of Knowledge (AoK) approach – where respondents were asked about settlements which they have knowledge of through friends or relatives living there, or because they have themselves recently lived there⁶ – was combined with qualitative expert key informant (KI) interviews, and review of secondary data sources. Data was collected between August and October 2023 by WFP and covers 14 raions of Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. For secondary data review, in particular the Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) carried out by REACH has been used to compare and triangulate findings, with specific emphasis on the HSM rounds conducted in areas outside the control of the Government of Ukraine⁷. The mixed methods approach helped to establish a comprehensive overview of the humanitarian situation. It is important to note that due to the inability to collect data directly with residents, findings are of an indicative nature. Nevertheless, the findings from the qualitative, quantitative and secondary data review components tend to converge to a coherent picture of the situation, giving confidence in and validity to the findings. See page 9 for the detailed methodology.



Map 1. Assessed raions: control and proximity to frontline (as of September 2023)

Key findings

In all the assessed areas the population has reportedly decreased since February 2022, as people have displaced to other parts of the country or abroad. In areas close to the frontline, the decline has been particularly significant. In terms of the profiles of those who has remained in inaccessible areas, KIs most commonly mentioned older people, sometimes together with their caretaker relatives, people with specific vulnerabilities such as disabilities and chronic illnesses, and people with jobs there. In general, residents staying in the assessed areas reportedly either did not want to leave or could not leave. Some population movement takes place within these areas. People have been moving within the oblast or raion, mostly from settlements that were heavily affected by the hostilities or from rural to urban areas, as the latter have better infrastructure and accessibility. The qualitative expert KI interviews suggested that returns occurred both as temporary and permanent returns. Those who returned to stay permanently, did so mostly because of negative experiences with displacement, lack of livelihoods and employment, insufficient assistance in the areas of displacement, or lack of appropriate housing.

Some general trends emerged from the assessment findings:



Safety and security concerns unsurprisingly ran as a core theme throughout and tended to drive humanitarian needs. This was the case directly through fatalities or casualties, due to the presence of landmines and unexploded ordinances (UXOs), and from the damage to or collapse of civilian and critical infrastructure caused by hostilities, which then impacted access to healthcare, education, markets, land etc. In addition to that, personal security and protection risks were also evident in areas occupied by the Russian Federation, through “passportization”, forced transfers/deportations, detentions etc.⁸



The **closer people lived to the frontline and active hostilities**, the bigger and more severe their needs tended to be. Close to the frontline, infrastructural damage was worse, markets tended to not function, services were unavailable and fewer opportunities existed for jobs and livelihoods.



Consistent with findings from the rest of Ukraine, **economic access** also played a significant role in people’s ability to meet needs. Where markets and services functioned, issues of affordability were frequently mentioned for medicines, food and other necessities, and where livelihood opportunities were available, they often were reported to not pay sufficiently.

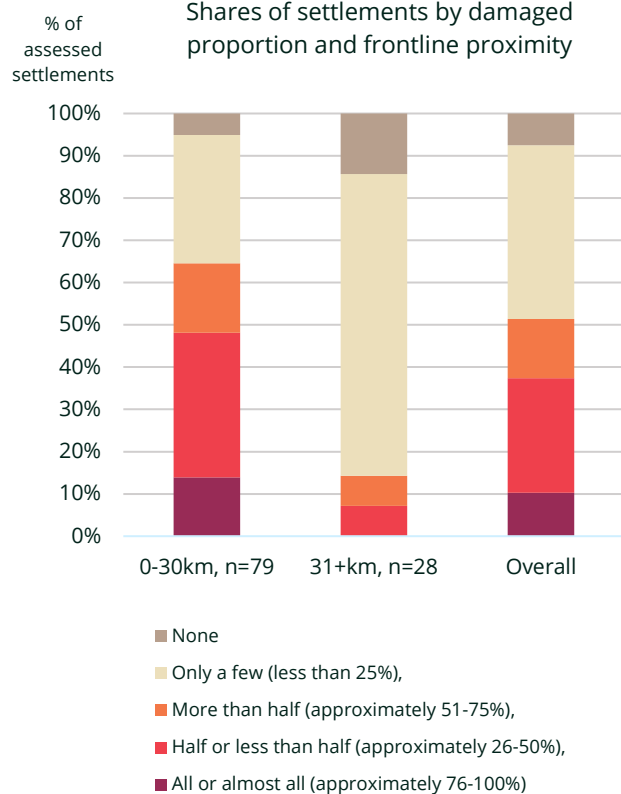


The primary safety concern in the assessed areas was related to **armed violence, shelling and bombardment**, especially in areas around the frontline. In nearly seven out of ten settlements, armed violence/shelling was mentioned by AoK respondents as a main concern, and, in just short of half, the presence of military actors. Landmines/UXOs and the use of housing or land for military purposes was also frequently flagged. In nearly all the assessed raions, AoK respondents reported to have heard of civilians who had been injured or killed by landmines/unexploded ordinances (UXOs). Several KIs mentioned that some groups were more exposed to risks. Shelling or bombardment tended to impose higher risks on elderly people, the bedridden and people living with disabilities, since they are less mobile, and it is more difficult for them to move to a safer place or escape from rubble.

AoK Survey. Top-5 reported safety and security incidents within a month prior to the survey

-  Armed violence/Shelling
-  Presence of military actors
-  Presence of landmines/UXO
-  Housing/land being used for military purposes
-  Social tension in the community

Figure 1. AoK survey. Reported proportion of civilian shelter with unrepairable damage. Shares of settlements by damaged proportion and frontline proximity



n = 107 (asked if damage to housing was reported). Assessed areas in Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. 1 July 2023 - 1 August 2023

The **impact of the war on civilian and critical infrastructure** was evident from both AoK respondents and expert KI interviews. Destruction was often reported as severe and at times beyond repair, shelters were often considered unsafe for living in, and water access was reportedly sometimes an issue. The scale of infrastructure and shelter damage, expectedly, varied with the proximity to the frontline, with, according to expert KIs, up to 90 percent damage in some settlements on the frontline and in those that experienced severe hostilities. Furthermore, according to REACH HSM, access to safe and adequate housing tended to be reported as more problematic in the areas within the 30 km to the frontline, compared to areas further away⁷.

In only about one-quarter of all assessed settlements was no impact on physical access to usual **stores and marketplaces** reported by AoK respondents. Due to the impact of the conflict, prices for goods reportedly rose in around 40 percent of assessed settlements, no functioning market existed in one-quarter of the settlements, and the quality of goods had deteriorated and/or assortment had decreased in around 25 percent of assessed settlements. According to KIs, in rural close-to-frontline areas, there were next to no stores available. In less affected areas, stores and

markets are functioning, but KIs pointed to increased prices in all inaccessible areas; the closer to the frontline, the higher prices are. Concerning goods availability in markets in the assessed areas, the overall picture was somewhat mixed, depending on the location and type of products. Expert KIs confirmed that in areas that have experienced heavy hostilities, few stores worked. In close-to-frontline areas, security issues posed a threat to market and store functionality.

"There was a hit directly in the store. And everybody, the seller and those who were buying there, everybody died."

Expert Key Informant Interview 2

Employment and livelihood opportunities have been limited by the direct impact of the war. Even when they existed, they varied between raions, often did not pay sufficiently to allow people to meet their needs, or would come with specific requirements that restricted people’s ability to engage in them. For areas occupied by the Russian Federation, several expert KIs pointed out that, to obtain formal employment, accessing services, taking up jobs and receiving social benefits, a Russian passport may be required⁹.

Pensions are an important source of income in the assessed areas. In areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine, pensions are typically delivered either in cash by Ukrposhta mailmen or via bank transfer to a debit card. At the time of the survey, both modalities were possible; however, the latter largely depended on the financial infrastructure availability. It was reported that to access pensions from bank accounts, people at times travelled to other settlements or got it through other people who had travelled to these settlements. Similar concerns, related to the lack of the access to the Ukrainian banking system, together with a lack of functioning banks and ATMs, were also found in the REACH HSM for the areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine⁷.

Figure 2. AoK survey. Top three sources of household income in the 30 days prior to data collection. Shares of settlement by reported income source



n = 164. Assessed areas in Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. 1 July 2023 - 19 August 2023

% of assessed settlements

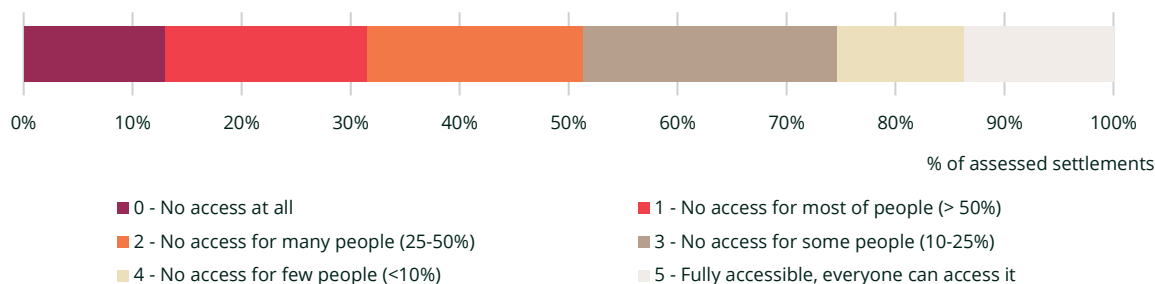
The experiences with **availability of and access to food** vary between locations. Areas in close proximity to the frontline in particular faced issues around destroyed market infrastructure hindering food supply in stores, which in combination with inability to afford food, create food access barriers. Even where food was available for purchase, households often struggled to afford sufficient quality and quantities. According to AoK respondents, in only around one in five settlements did people not face some type of barriers to access food items. The main reasons for this lack of access were reported to be high prices and lack of money. Having their own food production helped local residents to cope with the reduced economic access to food and poor availability and assortment. However, in areas close to the frontline, this source of food tended to be unreliable, mainly because of the security situation, shortage of resources, and reduced ability to store food.

"People need to survive, there is no work, so they grow something in the garden to survive."

AoK respondent

In terms of **access to healthcare**, the most commonly mentioned barriers that are quoted for about a third of all assessed settlements each, were the absence of a functional health facility nearby, the distance to the health facility, or the unavailability of the specific service being sought. This may pose additional challenges in particular for people in need of specific medical attention (e.g. people with disabilities, chronic illnesses etc.). According to AoK respondents, in more than ten percent of assessed settlements, there is no healthcare facility at all, and in an additional nearly 20 percent, most people do not have access to the facilities even if they exist. According to expert KIs, some facilities had reportedly been relocated or evacuated, while remaining ones were understaffed, as it is unsafe to work in frontline areas. Damage to healthcare infrastructure, according to KIs, also influenced the possibility to provide and receive healthcare services and KIs reported that the scope of services in areas beyond the frontline had reduced significantly. With regards to access to medicines, the top three most common barriers were the unavailability of the desired medicine, inability to afford the cost, and a lack of medicine in pharmacies.

Figure 3. AoK survey. Rating of healthcare services access in the 30 days prior to data collection.
Shares of settlements by access rating.



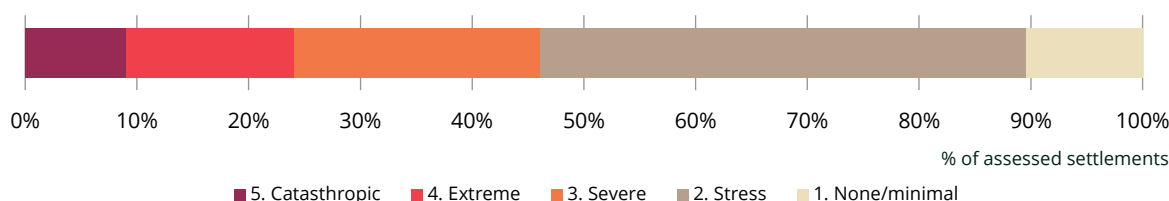
n = 146. Assessed areas in Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. 1 July 2023 - 19 August 2023

Education access is disrupted in many areas by damage to or destruction of educational facilities or their use for military purposes. Education has mostly moved online, which creates additional access barriers for households with intermittent or no internet access. In general, there are fewer school-aged children in the assessed areas compared to pre-February 2022, and some schools have been evacuated from close-to-frontline

or beyond-frontline to safer areas. In terms of barriers for children to access education, AoK respondents mentioned a lack of internet for remote learning, the security situation, and the fact that schools or equipment are destroyed or damaged, in particular in areas close to the frontline. Reluctance to enroll in Russian education programmes/curricula was also mentioned for areas beyond the frontline. KIs also referred to technical issues (internet disruptions and lack of equipment) and reduced hours of teaching as compared to in-person learning.

Asked to assess the **overall criticality of needs**, in just short of half of all assessed settlements, AoK respondents reported the settlement to be in a severe, extreme or catastrophic situation. Expert KIs' responses also reflected an overall critical situation, with the most severe assessment being for areas closer to frontline.

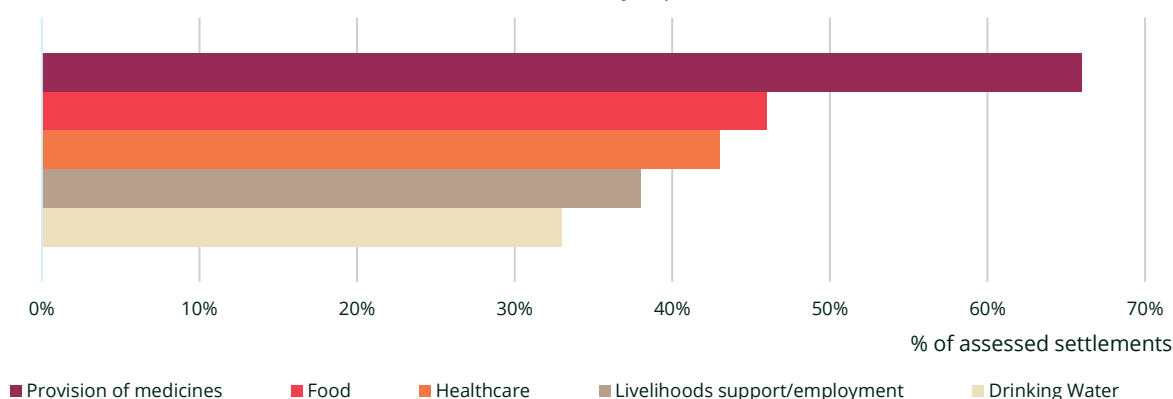
Figure 4. AoK survey. Perceived criticality of needs in settlement in the 30 days prior to data collection.
Shares of settlements by reported criticality.



n = 154. Assessed areas in Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. 1 July 2023 - 19 August 2023

Both AoK respondents and expert KIs were furthermore asked to suggest which **unmet priority needs** the population in the assessed areas have. Healthcare and medicines were frequently mentioned by both (including psychosocial support), as well as water (including drinking water and purification equipment), food, and livelihood support or employment. The three needs of highest priority appear to be the same as for other parts of Ukraine; according to MSNA household data collected in the areas accessible for direct data collection, provision of medicines, food and healthcare were the most mentioned needs. REACH HSM furthermore found financial resources to be the most frequently reported priority need in the areas beyond the frontline. Other needs indicated by HSM follow the same pattern as needs reported by the AoK respondents in this assessment¹⁰.

Figure 5. AoK survey. Top five priority currently unmet needs.
Shares of settlements by reported need.



n = 164. Assessed areas in Donetsk, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts. 1 July 2023 - 19 August 2023

Asked **about groups experiencing higher levels of needs**, AoK respondents pointed out the elderly in about six out of ten assessed settlements, people with disabilities in around one-third of settlements, and people with chronic illness and serious medical conditions which affect the quality of life in around a quarter. This coincides with the typical profiles of people who remain in the areas. For some areas under Russian occupation, KIs reported that receiving humanitarian aid is possible only for Russian passport holders; however, according to them, it is sometimes difficult for older people to do paperwork for obtaining a Russian passport. The travelling required to reach aid distribution points is also considered to be a barrier to getting aid. Additionally, some KIs stressed disparities in humanitarian support between people staying in areas close to the frontline and people who moved as IDPs in the rest of Ukraine, which some of them see as a potential factor in individual decisions to stay or leave.

"That is, she was provided with everything, why should she leave? Why evacuate? [...] Well, he moved ... He lived in the apartment for a month. Where should he get money for the future? He doesn't have them. He is a pensioner, his pension is minimal, that's all. Well, he will have IDP's 2,000 UAH, but that does not solve the issue."

Expert Key Informant Interview 10

To request the full report, please, contact ram.wfp.ukraine@wfp.org

Methodology

The assessment covers 14 raions of Donetska, Zaporizka, Luhanska and Khersonska oblasts close to and beyond the frontline. This includes areas currently not under the control of the Government of Ukraine, i.e. occupied by the Russian Federation, with the exception of areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine since 2014. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was used in the assessment, along with secondary data review.

For the quantitative component, the *Area of Knowledge (AoK)* approach¹¹ was implemented. Respondents are instead selected and interviewed because they have recent knowledge of a specific area of interest, without residing there currently, through personal experience or contact with family or friends living there within the last 14 days (responses are given on a settlement level). The AoK data was collected via telephone interviews between 1 July 2023 and 19 August 2023 by WFP. The final sample has 465 observations, then aggregated from respondent to settlement level¹², totalling 164 settlements. The questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used in the 2022 MSNA AoK and is also similar to the questionnaire used in the Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) carried out by REACH (see below).

For the qualitative component, qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with expert key informants (KIs) including Ukrainian local authorities and field-level representatives of humanitarian response actors (INGO, local NGO, volunteers). Questions were asked on raion, hromada, or oblast levels. In total 15 interviews were conducted online from mid-August to the beginning of October 2023.

The **secondary data review** includes a review of reports on events and humanitarian situations in inaccessible areas, used for contextualization and validation of findings obtained from quantitative and qualitative interviews. In particular the Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) carried out by REACH has been used to compare and triangulate findings, with specific emphasis on the HSM rounds conducted in areas outside the control of the Government of Ukraine.

Oblast	Raion	Interviews	Settlements
Donetska	Bakhmutskyi	46	15
	Mariupolskyi	46	3
Zaporizka	Berdianskyi	35	8
	Vasylivskyi	43	16
	Melitopolskyi	38	14
	Polohivskyi	58	26
Luhanska	Svativskyi	9	7
	Sievierodonetskyi	50	11
	Starobilskyi	19	10
	Shchastynskyi	6	4
Khersonska	Henicheskyi	17	12
	Kakhovskiyi	29	16
	Skadovskiyi	15	10
	Khersonskiyi	54	12
Total		465	164



Map 2: MSNA sampling map by data collection mode

The methodology presents certain limitations. The quantitative AoK approach is not statistically representative and thus findings cannot be extrapolated to the general population. Additionally, given the purposive sampling approach, not all settlements within raions are represented, nor represented proportionally to the number or types of settlements within raions. It is important to note that AoK quantitative findings cannot be interpreted as shares of people living in the inaccessible areas, but rather shares of assessed settlements in the raion, or overall shares of assessed settlements. Furthermore, limited possibilities for communication with people in the assessed areas pose a challenge. While the questionnaire adapted to the sensitivity of data collection in the areas, some questions have high levels of non-

response as respondents were not able or willing to answer. Qualitative expert KIs related to areas under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation often stressed during interviews that their knowledge of the situation is sometimes limited and cannot always be verified because of inaccessibility. Lastly, data collection of AoK data and qualitative expert interviews were slightly asynchronised, with AoK data collected somewhat earlier in the year than the qualitative interviews. Taken together, this means that findings of this assessment should be considered as indicative. At the same time, findings from the qualitative, quantitative and secondary data review components all tend to converge to a consistent, coherent picture of the general situation, the humanitarian needs and their drivers. Hence, despite the methodological limitations and the indicative nature of the data, the combined evidence points in the same direction, which gives further confidence in and validity to the findings.

ENDNOTES

¹ Internally displaced: As of September 2023. Source: <https://dtm.iom.int/ukraine>

² Refugees: As of December 2023. Source:

³ Romanenko V. (July 5, 2023). Length of “hot” frontline now exceeds 1200 kilometres – Ukrainian General Staff. Ukrainska Pravda.

⁴ With 7 percent being beyond the control since 2014-2015 and about 11 percent controlled by the Russian Federation as of 2023. Holder J. (September 28, 2023). Who’s Gaining Ground in Ukraine? This Year, No One. New York Times.

⁵ REACH, Ukraine Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment Terms of Reference (July 2023)

⁶ REACH, The Area of Knowledge (AoK) method for Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (September 2023)

⁷ REACH (2023) Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM). Areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine. Dashboard, Round 12, August 2023. <https://dashboards.impact-initiatives.org/ukr/hsm/ngca/> Dashboard with restricted access, reach out to REACH Ukraine to request access.

⁸ Understood as “The policy of mass conferral of Russian citizenship to residents of occupied areas of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions”. See OHCHR (2023). Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. 1 February 2023 to 31 July 2023. October 2023, and OHCHR (2023). Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. 1 August to 30 November 2023. December 2023, United Nations Human Rights Office of the Higher Commissioner.

⁹ Issues of ‘passportisation’ in areas under temporary Russian military control, e.g. requirement of obtaining a Russian passport in order to access public services, social benefits and employment opportunities are thoroughly documented by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). See chapter A in OHCHR (2023). Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. 1 February to 31 July 2023. December 2023, United Nations Human Rights Office of the Higher Commissioner.

¹⁰ REACH (2023) Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM). Areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine. Dashboard, Round 12, August 2023. <https://dashboards.impact-initiatives.org/ukr/hsm/ngca> Dashboard with restricted access, reach out to REACH Ukraine to request access.

¹¹ REACH (September 2023) The area of knowledge (AoK) method for humanitarian situation monitoring.

¹² The aggregation to settlement level was done by (a) the median of respondents’ responses for numerical variables, (b) answer selected in more than 40 percent of cases or most frequently selected for categorical variables of a nominal scale (for questions with multiple selection) or prevailing options (for questions where only one option can be selected), and (c) answer most frequently chosen or average for categorical variables of an ordinal scale.

PHOTO CREDIT

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