

CASE STUDY

UKRAINE 2016–2021 / CONFLICT

KEYWORDS: Cluster transition, Coordination and partnership, Exit/Handover, Local government engagement

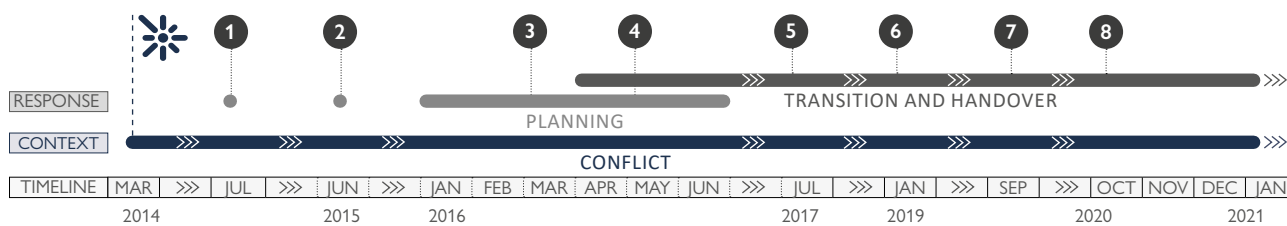
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| CRISIS | Conflict in eastern Ukraine, 2014 ongoing |
| PEOPLE AFFECTED | 5.2 million people affected* |
| PEOPLE DISPLACED | 1.5 million people displaced* |
| HOMES DAMAGED/ DESTROYED | Over 50,000 homes damaged since the start of the conflict* |
| PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS | 300,000 people with shelter needs (winterization, NFIs etc.) 2,000 - 2,500 homes need repair* |
| RESPONSE LOCATION | National (coordination) |
| PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE RESPONSE | 72,490 people supported with NFIs 25,716 people supported with shelter assistance** |
| RESPONSE OUTPUTS | Cluster transition and closure |

* Source: [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ukraine \(2019\)](#)
** Source: [Global Shelter Cluster \(2020\)](#)



SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

The Shelter/NFI Cluster in Ukraine developed a transitional plan in 2016 for handover of the humanitarian shelter coordination responsibilities to national and local authorities. The Cluster Lead Agency progressively nationalised its coordination team and facilitated leadership handover to Ukraine's national authorities through capacity building and technical support. The handover process faced significant delays due to government restructuring, but the focus remained on responsible disengagement by the Cluster team. This case study highlights the importance of planning for disengagement from the beginning of a response. The multi-year strategy timeline helped the Cluster team to navigate the complex political landscape, ensure that required technical support was provided, and manage unexpected changes in national leadership in a complex humanitarian situation.



- 2014:** Armed conflict in eastern Ukraine
- 1 July 2014:** Shelter/NFI Cluster activation.
- 2 June 2015:** Decentralized sub-national Cluster coordination structure.
- 3 Mar 2016:** Humanitarian Coordination Architectural Review.
- 4 May 2016:** Cluster Transition plan.
- 5 Jul 2017:** Information Management capacity building of national/ local authorities.
- 6 Jan 2019:** Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ukraine Government.
- 7 Sep 2019:** Changes within the structure of the Ukraine Government.
- 8 Oct 2020:** All Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) members endorsed the initiation of the deactivation process.



Donetsk Regional State Administration discusses with humanitarian stakeholders the process for restoration of damaged and destroyed houses.

CONTEXT

For more background information on the crisis and response in Ukraine, see [Shelter Projects 2015-2016 \(A.43\)](#)

In 2014, the Ukraine Shelter/NFI Cluster was activated in response to the humanitarian consequences of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Despite numerous ceasefire agreements, millions of people were exposed to active hostilities, particularly along the 427-km ‘contact line’ that divides the affected areas. The conflict resulted in the damage or destruction of over 50,000 homes, as well as hospitals, schools, roads, water supply systems and other civilian infrastructure.

From 2014 to 2015, the Shelter Cluster strategy focused primarily on emergency response, prioritizing home repairs and winterization support. In 2016, based on the context and considering the temporary and timebound nature of humanitarian clusters, Shelter Cluster activities shifted towards transitional shelter solutions. While some repair and reconstruction activities were initiated, they were moderate in scope due to the limited number of development actors.

The protracted nature of the crisis diminished the livelihood options for conflict-affected Ukrainians and displaced families - who struggle to pay rent, utilities, and heating – and is forcing an increasing number of IDPs to involuntarily return to Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCAs).

SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

Ukraine endured six years of economic hardship prior to the start of hostilities in 2014, which weakened the government’s capacity to respond to humanitarian needs when the conflict erupted. The economic crisis devastated Ukraine’s construction industry, intensifying a need for new housing stock, and repairs of aging buildings.

Ukraine uses a housing code inherited from the Soviet period which requires separate processes for land and home ownership. In early 2013, changes were initiated to Ukraine’s housing policies and institutional framework in order to address the challenges of poor housing conditions,



The conflict resulted in the damage or destruction of over 50,000 homes.

the need for major repairs and maintenance, and a long queue of people seeking more adequate housing. These changes to municipal standards and building codes were not successfully resolved prior to the start of the crisis.

When the government approved new housing policies, there was not adequate funding to implement them. Major political protests and civil unrest in November 2013 sparked the beginning of the current crisis, and in March of 2014, armed conflict in the east of the country erupted.

SITUATION AFTER THE CRISIS

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, over 3,000 civilians have been killed and approximately 9,000 injured. The established ‘contact line’ dividing Ukrainian Government Controlled Areas (GCA) and Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) has only five checkpoints, creating enormous wait times and restrictions for the over one million people attempting to cross from one side to the other each month. According to the Shelter Cluster, throughout the conflict over 20,000 homes were damaged in GCA areas of Eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast, with NFI needs exacerbated by Ukraine’s harsh winters and the poor socio-economic conditions.

In urban areas, the influx of displaced people has strained state social support mechanisms and the acceptance of the host communities.

NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The National Shelter Cluster strategy evolved from a primary focus on emergency response in 2014 to increasingly more reconstruction and support for durable solutions. While the Cluster maintains a capacity to respond to emergency needs and to support winterization needs of the most vulnerable, efforts have shifted to facilitating access to permanent shelter due to the absence of development donors to mobilise a response in the 20km radius of the conflict line.

Considering recommendations made by the Humanitarian Coordination Architectural Review in 2016, the Cluster established objectives to decentralize coordination and progressively hand over responsibility for national coordination of humanitarian shelter activities to Ukrainian authorities. The first transition plan was developed in 2016 which was then revised in terms of timeline in the first quarter of 2017. The Shelter/NFI Cluster transition strategy activities focused on two key objectives:

- To further reinforce coordination capacity of local leadership at the sub-national level; and
- To develop the shelter coordination and technical capacity of national authorities so that they could eventually take over coordination of the humanitarian shelter and NFI response.

The Ukraine Shelter Cluster planned for the transition of coordination responsibilities to begin at the sub-national level due to the sub-national Shelter Cluster teams' good working relationships with municipal and oblast (regional) authorities. Focal points from local authorities regularly participated in sub-national Cluster activities and many local mayors were involved in the coordination of shelter interventions. Despite their good will and commitment however, it still took time for local officials to develop adequate coordination teams for the shelter response and to provide adequate resourcing to some villages.

In 2017, the sub-national Shelter Cluster started to work with the State of Emergency Services in Donetsk Oblast in addition to the Donetsk Regional Administration. This cooperation enabled shelter materials to be deployed by Shelter Cluster partners, so that government brigades could conduct much needed light and medium repairs.

Trainings on the damage database and winterization coordination also started; however, government focal points for shelter transition were limited. Two staff covered Donetsk Oblast while Luhansk Oblast struggled to participate in humanitarian coordination. Beyond attendance to Cluster meetings of various clusters at sub-national level, there were not enough staff in local government to do the shelter monitoring that the sub-national Shelter Cluster was conducting.

In late 2018, national authorities identified staff for coordinating shelter activities and the Cluster focused on supporting the transition of coordination responsibilities at the national level. In January of 2019, after a lengthy process, the transition was formalized between the Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) and the Ukraine Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories (MTOT) through a Memorandum of Understanding that outlined the activities and expectations of both parties. In general terms, the CLA would support the transfer of experience in the coordination of humanitarian shelter assistance to the MTOT. In return the MTOT agreed to the establishment of a shelter/NFI coordination group within the ministry. The MoU was valid for the period of one year, with automatic renewal.

In 2018, various housing and social policy ministries were merged, and the government allocated more funding. The sub-national Shelter Cluster began holding additional coordination meetings in locations such as Mariinka and Zolote. Local authorities were able to chair these meetings and their increased ownership led to better participation by local NGOs.

In addition to the co-chairing of sub-national Cluster meetings, the Cluster built the capacity of Ukrainian authorities to “coordinate and meet residual humanitarian needs in line with humanitarian principles” through training and advocacy. Local authority focal points were trained in the Cluster's Information Management systems (winterization referrals, damage database inputs, etc.) and in humanitarian shelter and NFI response standards. At the national level, dedicated information management staff were provided to MTOT counterparts for technical support while they

began to take on responsibility of coordination tools and national databases (5W and Residential Damage Database).

In 2019, the CLA signed a Protocol of Intentions with MTOT which outlined the modalities of cooperation, putting the Government of Ukraine as the lead in coordination in GCA areas of Ukraine, with the CLA serving as a backup technical and information-providing role. The Cluster engaged in building MTOT's capacity: two Cluster team members worked for two days per week from the Ministry premises.

Due to the election process in mid-2019 and the further merging of MTOT with the Ministry of Veteran Affairs in September 2019, the process of handover was then put on hold until the moment the newly merged Ministry defined its structure and tasks. In 2020, the Cluster restarted the handover process, assuring the continuity of the process. In parallel, the Cluster continued its regular sub-national coordination in cooperation with local authorities, extending the co-chairing role of the authorities where possible and eventually transferring the role of chairing.



Cluster Lead Agency observes repair needs in Luhansk Oblast Government Controlled Area.

MAIN CHALLENGES

One of the greatest challenges of managing the handover to Ukrainian authorities was navigating the complex political landscape. Differences between regions, between ministries, and between individuals in power could turn a seemingly straightforward plan into a challenging and complex series of personal opinions with unclear lines of authority. It was also difficult to try to compete for the attention and time of national and local authorities who already had full time jobs and didn't necessarily appreciate or understand the work being done by humanitarian shelter actors. The Cluster also encountered reluctance from some regional authorities who were skeptical about their capacity to take on the shelter information management (IM) and coordination duties.

During the implementation of the transition strategy, national and regional elections delayed decision-making and resulted in changed focal points over time.

The Cluster has attempted to mitigate these challenges as much as possible through the signed Protocol of Intentions with the Ukraine MTOT and by adopting a realistic, long term timeline that allows them to adapt the strategy to unexpected changes and delays as required.

LINKS WITH RECOVERY

In order to progress long-term sustainability, and durable shelter solutions for Ukraine's displaced population, the Cluster has also been attempting to mobilize development actors and government counterparts to revive the housing and construction industry and address issues with national housing policy respectively. The Cluster has focused on supporting the mainstreaming of housing policy principles into longer-term planning while maintaining the importance of international humanitarian law as more demands for compensation accumulate.

The Cluster also supported the Government of Ukraine's implementation of a nation-wide compensation program for destroyed houses. After a few revisions and provision of comments by partners and the Cluster's HLP Working Group, the program became operational in 2020, with the plan to provide compensation of up to USD 10,500 per household, to support sustainable shelter solutions.

EXIT/HANDOVER

On the 26th of October 2020, the Shelter Cluster's Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) met in Kyiv to plan the next steps of the Cluster's strategy and transition. At the time of the meeting, the Shelter Cluster estimated that there was a residual caseload of 1,000 households in need of shelter repairs. Since 2017, the significant gap that had existed in Donetsk Oblast was addressed by the State of Emergency Services, who proved to be a capable state actor at sub-national level – even reaching areas where humanitarian actors were not able to access.

The number of humanitarian partners and available funds have continued to diminish as residual needs decrease, while the Government of Ukraine assumes greater responsibility to respond to the longer-term consequences of the conflict for government-controlled areas of Ukraine. In addition to mobilization of the State of Emergency Services, the Government of Ukraine also introduced the state mechanism on compensation. In 2020, UAH 20 million (approx. USD 735,000) was allocated for the compensation as a pilot process. In Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA), the cooperation with the Ukrainian government authorities does not exist, and the number of partners continues to be limited to cover the humanitarian needs. After discussing challenges and their implications, all SAG members approved the initiation of the deactivation process of the Shelter Cluster in Ukraine.

NEXT STEPS

The next phase of work towards the handover of coordination responsibilities is to ensure that Shelter/NFI coordination responsibilities are written into ministerial job descriptions, processes, and reporting lines. The formalization of sector coordination into the Ministry's formal architecture will ensure the leadership role and reinforce institutional memory. The goal is that capacity building investments made by the Cluster are not entirely dependent on individuals, but built into the Ministry's day to day operations.

WIDER IMPACTS

While the process and criteria of Cluster transition or deactivation are well documented in the IASC's Reference Module for Cluster Coordination, few good examples of a transition process have been properly studied and documented. While still ongoing, the example from the Ukraine Shelter Cluster provides a realistic perspective of the timeline, challenges, and level of engagement required to successfully transition from a Cluster response to a national authority led sector response.

The inter-agency context of Ukraine was also difficult for the Shelter Cluster, because not all Clusters were willing to deactivate according to the timeline originally agreed in 2016. After the Logistics Cluster and Early Recovery Cluster deactivated in country, the Shelter Cluster team took on the negotiating of handover terms and became responsible for handing over data to the Government of Ukraine's platform for coordination and building the capacity of the government to do informational updates. This resulted in the Government of Ukraine using the Shelter Cluster Factsheet template to do updates on the wider humanitarian response.



Shelter/NFI Cluster Lead Agency representative meets with the Government of Ukraine to discuss transition of the Shelter Cluster and protection and rights of IDPs in Ukraine.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Realistic Timeline.** After the first annual review of the strategy in 2017, the Cluster wisely chose to adopt a more long-term approach that took into consideration the pace of local authorities and allotted adequate time for coordination capacity building and IM support.
- √ **Formal agreement with National Authorities.** Developing a detailed Protocol of Intentions with the Ukraine MTOT served as an excellent tool to ensure that both parties agreed on their specific responsibilities and required actions. Furthermore, it served to document the commitment by national authorities in the case of a change in leadership due to election or change of personnel. It must be followed and supported however, by the inclusion of sector coordination responsibilities into ministerial job descriptions, processes, and reporting lines to formalize these responsibilities internally.
- √ **Support to handover of Cluster coordination and IM tools and data systems.** Handing over a complex collection of tools and systems to a new coordinating authority will almost guarantee that they are not used and are quickly forgotten. By assigning dedicated IM support, and bringing local authorities in to co-chair sub-national Clusters at an early stage, the Shelter Cluster built their capacity in these systems, ensuring their long-term success.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Under appreciation for the pace of decision making and action by local authorities.** While the initial timeline was revised, the process is still ongoing. More support from development experts particularly those working on the issues of decentralization and economic reform could have proved beneficial in support to humanitarian actors.
- × **Lack of Inter-Cluster buy in to transition.** The planned transition of the Clusters was not adequately communicated to the government nor was it consistent across all Clusters. The Humanitarian Response Plan continued to be implemented in the normal way, despite the adoption of transition plans, which sent mixed messages about the humanitarian needs and government capacities.
- × **Donors funded some aspects of the transition,** but the slow mobilization of development donors meant that it was difficult to solve some of the systemic issues in Ukrainian housing policy. With humanitarians ending their support of humanitarian programming for internally displaced people outside of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast in 2017, development actors should have begun to support on IDP housing issues in these areas earlier, which would have prepared them to roll out such projects in Donetsk and Luhansk by 2019-2020.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **The speed and agility of dedicated humanitarian organizations is different to that of national and local government counterparts** (sometimes faster, sometimes slower). This is a major consideration when agreeing to work in partnership.
- **It is important to maintain a professional, positive, and proactive relationship with national and local authorities as partnerships are often long-term.** Successful transition requires a high level of transparency and trust.
- **Understanding of dynamics between different regional authorities is required** to tailor coordination and response architecture appropriately and for looking ahead to identify potential problem situations.