

## **The United Nations in Ukraine: A timely and effective humanitarian response?**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACR	Annual Country Report
CBT	Cash-Based Transfers
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSL	Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster
GCA	Government-Controlled Areas
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IACP	Inter-Agency Contingency Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LEO	Limited Emergency Operation
MPC	Multi-Purpose Cash
NGCA	Non-Government-Controlled Areas
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

## Introduction

*“(…) until this war ends, the World Food Programme won’t stop doing everything we can to provide food and hope.”<sup>52</sup>*

Since 24 February 2022, major news outlets have focused their reporting on the military and geopolitical aspects of Russia’s war in Ukraine, while the dire humanitarian situation of the Ukrainian people surviving in the war-torn country is often not featured as prominently. Certainly, Western nations are sympathetic to the Ukrainian population, not least demonstrated by the high willingness to host Ukrainian refugees. However, the hardship of surviving and even leading a decent life in a country crushed by a cruel Russian war of aggression merits constant attention from politics, media and civil society.

Ultimately, the resilience of the Ukrainian population will play a significant role in determining the outcome of this war. Ukrainians are not just confronted with the threat to their lives but also face a dire economic decline which has already been unfolding since the beginning of hostilities in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has sharply worsened since the war expanded to all of Ukraine in 2022.<sup>53</sup> In 2022, Ukraine's GDP contracted by 29.2%, inflation reached 26.6%, and poverty rose from 5.5% to 24.2%.<sup>54</sup> Further, food production, particularly grain production, has been disrupted since the onset of hostilities on 24 February 2022 and is only recovering slowly, where such recovery is possible.

This illustrates the daily struggle of Ukrainians to meet their basic needs in regions where operational markets still exist, and an almost insurmountable challenge in areas directly affected by fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, this paper will examine the war in Ukraine through a humanitarian lens, with particular emphasis on food assistance, as it represents a critical dimension of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. While a multitude of humanitarian agencies have scaled up or initiated operations in Ukraine since February 2022, this paper will focus on the sector of food security and thereby, on the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), as it is the largest humanitarian agency addressing food insecurity.<sup>56</sup> Due to this paper’s limited scope, it is not possible to specify the work of other humanitarian actors.

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<sup>52</sup> David Beasley, Twitter @WFPChief on 13 April 2022. URL: <https://twitter.com/WFPChief/status/1514315776278380544> (last accessed on 25 May 2023).

<sup>53</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 8. URL: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/annual-country-reports-ukraine> (last accessed on 20 May 2023).

<sup>54</sup> “Ukraine – Economy”. In: The World Bank. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview#3> (last accessed on 19 May 2023).

<sup>55</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, pp. 8-9.

<sup>56</sup> “Who we are”. In: World Food Programme. URL: <https://www.wfp.org/who-we-are> (last accessed on 20 May 2023).

The aim of this paper is to analyze whether the WFP's operation since February 2022 has been a timely and effective response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis. The paper will first outline the emergency response structure of the United Nations (UN) system. Then, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine will be described, focusing on the WFP's response. The analysis will center on the elements of timeliness and effectiveness of the operation before reaching the conclusion.

### **The United Nations emergency response structures**

The war in Ukraine is an act of aggression initiated by Russia, therefore, the involvement of UN organizations as well as other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are mostly of humanitarian nature. Development or peace-building measures are not relevant to this context, as it is not a civil war setting and prior to the war, Ukraine demonstrated relative democratic development and economic growth. As the paper primarily examines the World Food Programme's role in Ukraine, a United Nations entity, it is imperative to provide an overview of the United Nations' emergency response system.<sup>57</sup> The UN has created an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to improve the emergency response capacities of humanitarian aid agencies in periods of overwhelming humanitarian crises. To this end, the IASC-platform unites leaders of 18 humanitarian organizations, consisting of both UN agencies and NGOs. As the WFP is considered a humanitarian agency, the Executive Director of the WFP is a member of the IASC-chair, which is led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). Thus, the ERC has a dual function, also holding the position of Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs reporting directly to the UN Secretary General. Ultimately, the IASC serves as a tool to streamline the response process in case of a crisis, enabling agencies to mobilize their resources in a complementary way. Further, the ERC can raise issues of high concern with the UN Security Council (SC).<sup>58</sup>

The IASC can call for a *humanitarian system-wide scale-up activation*. Once put in place, this leads to an increase in attention and resources to address an unfolding humanitarian crisis through those agencies delivering humanitarian aid in the country. Five criteria have been outlined to assess whether a scale-up activation is required: scale, urgency, complexity, capacity, and risk of failure to deliver effectively and at scale to affected populations. Whether these criteria are met and a scale-up activation must be induced, is examined by a preliminary assessment of the

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<sup>57</sup> "The United Nations System". In: United Nations. Date of last revision: July 2021. URL: <https://www.un.org/en/delegate/page/un-system-chart> (last accessed on 20 May 2023).

<sup>58</sup> "The Inter-Agency Standing Committee". In: IASC. URL: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/the-inter-agency-standing-committee> (last accessed on 19 May 2023).

unfolding situation, including figures on affected populations. The findings are compiled by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Finally, informed by the previous steps, the decision to activate or not activate a scale-up lies with the IASC members, although the ERC is the ultimate authority to approve the scale-up.

The case of a scale-up activation applies to Ukraine, therefore, the subsequent steps of such a decision are described. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)<sup>59</sup> is notified of the scale-up, a local platform which represents all humanitarian UN agencies present in the country.<sup>60</sup> The Resident Coordinator (RC) assumes the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and leads the HCT. The HC oversees and ensures the effective implementation of emergency response efforts in the country. The HC reports to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who is ultimately accountable for the successful response to the emergency.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the HCT is the main body for the exchange and decision-making among UN agencies and NGOs in a country. If this forum fails to reach a decision in an emergency, the HC has the authority to step in.<sup>62</sup> However, the IASC has established an additional response mechanism for humanitarian emergencies, namely the *UN Cluster Approach*. It facilitates the coordination of sector-specific assistance among humanitarian actors by assigning them member or leadership roles among the various clusters<sup>63</sup> along with distinct areas of responsibility. For example, two UN agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WFP) address food insecurity, hence, they lead the Food Security Cluster together. Additionally, WFP leads the Logistics Cluster as well as the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC). The IASC ensures through this approach that the crisis is

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<sup>59</sup> As this paper's focus lies with the humanitarian agencies aid delivery, the UN Country Team (UNCT) is referred to as Humanitarian Country Team. In other contexts, the term UNCT includes development and peace building initiatives as well as agencies, however, in the context of the emergency response in Ukraine this is not yet relevant. "Humanitarian Coordination Leadership". In: OCHA. URL: <https://www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination/humanitarian-coordination-leadership> (last accessed 15 May 2023).

<sup>60</sup> IASC, Protocol 1, pp. 1-4. For further details in the five criteria refer to IASC, Protocol 1, p. 2. URL: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda/iasc-protocol-1-humanitarian-system-wide-scale-activation-definition-and-procedures-2018> (last accessed 15 May 2023).

<sup>61</sup> "Who does what?". In: OCHA Services, Humanitarian Response. URL: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/es/coordination/clusters/who-does-what> (last accessed 14 May 2022).

<sup>62</sup> IASC, Protocol 2, pp. 1-2. URL: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda/iasc-protocol-2-empowered-leadership-humanitarian-system-wide-scale-activation-2018> (last accessed 16 May 2023).

<sup>63</sup> A complete list of the Clusters: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Shelter; Protection; Nutrition; Logistics; Health; Food & Security; Emergency Telecommunications; Education; Early Recovery; Camp Coordination and Camp Management. "What is the Cluster Approach?". In: OCHA Services, Humanitarian Response. URL: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/es/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach> (last accessed 16 May 2023).

addressed in a complementary and efficient way. Each Cluster Lead Agency reports to the HC and closely aligns its operational plan with the governmental institutions.<sup>64</sup>

Notably, the UN General Assembly has outlined that the above-described emergency response structure is subordinate to the country's emergency response. The government retains the right to call for support or decline the involvement of humanitarian actors.<sup>65</sup> In the case of Ukraine, the government has welcomed the support of the UN agencies and NGOs to better address the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The humanitarian community creates internal and external products to facilitate timely and effective emergency preparedness as well as response, which will provide the basis for the analysis of this paper. The creation, implementation and evaluation of these products is considered a part of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. For internal use and under the guidance of the HC, the humanitarian community is required to develop an Inter-Agency Contingency Plan (IACP) to specify scenario-building linked to increasing humanitarian needs along with a budgetary plan. IACPs are mostly confidential documents. Further, the contingency plan defines a threshold above which a scale-up in humanitarian assistance is activated.<sup>66</sup> To ensure internal coordination and increase external awareness, the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is drafted annually, based on the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The HRP can be seen as a baseline product, coordinating the response of humanitarian actors and the mobilization of their resources. The HNO provides a concise analysis of the critical humanitarian needs in a country, informing the other products. The HC initiates and coordinates the creation of the documents.<sup>67</sup>

Externally, the humanitarian community can publish a Flash Appeal to communicate funding needs and response strategies to donor countries as well as the private sector. This exercise is usually done rapidly upon the outbreak of an emergency, if there is a need to revise and adapt figures described in the HRP or HNO.<sup>68</sup> In the following chapter these documents are examined on the basis of the Ukrainian example.

The World Food Programme has its own emergency preparedness and response structure, as do the other organizations, too. As part of its preparedness workstream, the World Food

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<sup>64</sup> "Who does what?". In: OCHA Services, Humanitarian Response.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "What is the Humanitarian Programme Cycle?". In: OCHA Services, Knowledge Management Platform. URL: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space> (last accessed 17 May 2023) and "Preparedness and Risk Management". In: OCHA. URL: <https://www.unocha.org/es/themes/preparedness-and-risk-management> (last accessed 17 May 2023).

<sup>67</sup> IASC, The implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle, pp. 7-10.

<sup>68</sup> IASC, Guidelines for Flash Appeals, pp. 1-3.



Programme has outlined three main elements, namely Early Warning systems, Inter-Agency coordination, and Civil-Military Coordination. While the first two elements are geared towards scaling up internal preparedness, the latter factor involves communication with national and international militaries, as the implementation of the operation in a context of armed confrontation depends on humanitarian access. However, WFP's priority lies in emergency response, supported by a range of mechanisms. These include experienced emergency workforce, a global supply chain capacity for reaching vulnerable communities, an Operations Centre for communication and coordination, and operational information management for informed decision-making and accountability.<sup>69</sup> Concretely, this translates into active participation in the Cluster Approach, as the WFP leads and co-leads three clusters which are managed under the HCT. In the case of the World Food Programme, assistance is delivered either in the form of In-Kind Food Distribution or Cash-Based Transfers (CBT). Consequently, if the WFP decides to deliver aid in the form of CBT, it can choose between a variety of distribution mechanisms such as value vouchers or bank transfers.<sup>70</sup> The following section will discuss the application of all these mechanisms in Ukraine as well as WFP's operational experience in the country.

### **The Humanitarian Community in Ukraine**

In this paper, the examined period will be limited to the year 2022, starting with the major escalation of Russian hostilities targeting all of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The assault worsened the prevailing humanitarian crisis in the eastern regions of the country and extended the Russian aggression to all of Ukraine. After the war erupted in eastern Ukraine in February 2014, the Humanitarian Country Team directed their assistance efforts to both sides of the "contact line", which divided Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine into the Government-controlled area (GCA) and the non-Government-controlled area (NGCA).<sup>71</sup> The WFP had previously been involved in the provision of humanitarian aid from February 2014 until December 2017.<sup>72</sup> Following the events since 24 February 2022 and upon the Ukrainian government's authorization, the WFP opted for the re-establishment of operations in order to cover gaps in the response of the HCT. Given the WFP's leadership role across multiple clusters, its expertise and capacities were

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<sup>69</sup> "Emergency Preparedness and Response". In: World Food Programme. URL: <https://www.wfp.org/emergency-preparedness-and-response> (last accessed 17 May 2023).

<sup>70</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 - Ukraine, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, pp. 8-9.

indispensable for effectively managing the challenging circumstances and addressing the overwhelming situation.<sup>73</sup>

In line with the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, products like the HRP and an Inter-Agency Contingency Plan were produced and shared in early 2022 under the guidance of the HC and OCHA. However, given the scale of the Russian military campaign, extending well beyond the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the relevance of these products diminished.<sup>74</sup> Thus, a Flash Appeal was created. Quickly, the HC and OCHA consolidated an initial Flash Appeal by 1 March 2022, which was revised twice in the following months as the humanitarian situation deteriorated. This section will cover the content of the first and third Flash Appeal drafted in August 2022 and will outline its strategic objectives as well as the related activities. Further, this section will describe the WFP's operation and its own strategic outcomes lined out in the Ukraine Limited Emergency Operation (LEO) product.<sup>75</sup>

Barely a week into the war, the first Flash Appeal outlined the operational response plan of the different clusters based on a re-evaluation of needs for an initial response period of three months until May 2022. The document reiterates the HC's leadership role in ensuring a timely and efficient emergency response. With the estimations subject to the course of the war, the report outlined 12 million people in need along with the initial target figure of 6 million<sup>76</sup>, including some 2.1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). To meet the strategic objectives, the appeal outlined budgetary requirements of 1.1 billion US Dollar (USD) which depicts a stark increase from the Humanitarian Response Plan's 190 million USD published two weeks prior to the escalation (of which only 18 million USD had been secured, which can be interpreted as a lack of international attention). Moreover, the appeal outlined regions of high concern, namely the capital, the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as "newly impacted areas" (Kyivska, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Mykolaivska, Odesa, Sumy, and Zhytomyrska oblasts).<sup>77</sup> Before the intensification of hostilities, the HC coordinated six active clusters with 119 organizations present in Ukraine, of which 22 were delivering aid actively in Donetsk and Luhansk region.<sup>78</sup>

In August 2022, the Flash Appeal was revised, with the new response period reaching up to December 2022. After six months of incessant hostilities, the humanitarian community had gathered a deeper understanding of operational challenges, such as humanitarian access, as well as

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<sup>73</sup> World Food Programme, Limited Emergency Operation – Ukraine 2022, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal - March 2022, p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> This target is based on the initial inter-agency rapid assessment prioritizing the most urgent humanitarian needs. OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal - March 2022, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal - March 2022, pp. 2-5.

<sup>78</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022, pp. 10-11.

emerging humanitarian needs. Therefore, the revised estimation of people in need had increased to 17.7 million (resulting in an additional 5.7 million people compared to the initial version) along with the revised target figure of 11.5 million (resulting in additional 5.5 million people). However, the budgetary requirements recorded the largest increase of up to 4.3 billion USD.<sup>79</sup> The exponential rise in the cost of the operation is due to the severe inflation of 26.6% at the end of 2022 as the GDP declined by nearly 30% in 2022.<sup>80</sup> By July 2022, more than 400 humanitarian organizations, including many national NGOs, were active in Ukraine (nearly four times as the 119 organizations at the beginning of the year).<sup>81</sup>

Humanitarian aid delivery had been expanded to the country's 24 oblasts.<sup>82</sup> The following strategic objectives intend to inform the humanitarian community's response:

1. Provide principled and timely, lifesaving multisectoral assistance to people affected by the war, that is based on their perceptions and feedback and inclusive of gender, age, and diversity approaches.
2. Protect conflict-affected people and civilian infrastructure, and advocate for parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law.
3. Support provision of essential and gender-responsive services that are designed in response to expressed needs of communities, both in areas impacted by the conflict and in locations hosting displaced people.

The first and third strategic objectives are addressed by, among other clusters, the WFP-led Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster (FSL)<sup>83</sup> as well as the Logistics Cluster and Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC). The revised Flash Appeal emphasizes the necessity for gender- and age-responsive assistance, raising awareness for the discrepancy in needs among men and women, but also children.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, in line with the Cluster Approach, the Flash Appeal outlined planning figures for the active clusters in Ukraine. The subsequent table presents an overview of the planning figures for those clusters in which the WFP is actively engaged:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> "Ukraine – Economy". In: The World Bank.

<sup>81</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12 and p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Generally, this cluster is named "Food Security Cluster", however, in the Ukraine context the cluster has been established under the title "Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster".

<sup>84</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022, pp. 19-20.

Table 1: Planning figures per WFP-led cluster

Cluster	People In Need	People Targeted	Requirements (USD)
FSL	9.3 million	5.2 million	3.7 million
ETC	N/A	N/A	905.4 million
Logistics	N/A	N/A	6.8 million

Source: Author’s illustration based on figures provided in: OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022, p. 4.

To enable the monitoring of these target indications, each cluster has linked activities to one of the three strategic objectives by identifying a qualitative indicator that can be translated into a quantitative target (Annex 1). The ETC and Logistics Cluster interventions are not primarily oriented towards direct assistance to affected populations, as they assume a facilitative role in the context of the humanitarian response. Rather, they provide technical assistance to the humanitarian actors and thereby, ensure that these can operate smoothly. Hence, they do not have a target figure for beneficiaries and measure their indicators by reached/not reached standards. The FSL Cluster addresses the first strategic objective with a variety of activities. Overall, its target to reach 5.2 million people was derived from assessments of the food security situation in Ukraine. These showed that 9.3 million people in Ukraine are in need of food assistance with 5 percent of the population severely food insecure and 14 percent moderately food insecure.<sup>85</sup> Annex 1 provides a detailed overview of all the FSL Cluster activities, as they will be of interest in the analysis as they will be compared to the WFP’s own structure of activities (Annex 2).

In conjunction with the reestablishment of the WFP’s presence in Ukraine, the organization institutionalized its activities by developing a response plan known as the Limited Emergency Operation (LEO). At the onset of the war, the LEO foresaw an operational period of three months, February to May 2022, with a cost of nearly 50 million USD.<sup>86</sup> However, due to the ongoing armed hostilities and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, four Budget Revisions (BR) were undertaken to extend the operation’s duration and adapt it to the protracted crisis. This paper’s analysis will rely on the last BR to the LEO which was published in August 2022 as this best reflects the operational reality. This BR extended the operation’s validity until December 2022. The BR set the overall cost of the operation at nearly 1.95 billion USD (February-December 2022) along with a beneficiary target of nearly 4.7 million people.<sup>87</sup> In total, the LEO and subsequent BRs outlined two Strategic Outcomes (SO):

<sup>85</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022 – Annex, pp. 3-6.

<sup>86</sup> World Food Programme, Limited Emergency Operation – Ukraine 2022, pp. 1-2.

<sup>87</sup> World Food Programme, Ukraine Budget Revision 4 – August 2022, p. 1.

1. Crisis-affected populations are able to meet their basic food needs.
2. Humanitarian partners have access to reliable coordination and services including support in logistics coordination, emergency telecommunications, and on-demand services to enable effective humanitarian response.

The first SO is addressed by the Food Security and Livelihood Cluster, the second SO is under the responsibility of the Logistics Cluster and the ETC. Specific activities were created by the WFP to meet the Strategic Outcomes and better measure their progress.<sup>88</sup> While the LEO initially focused its emergency response on Ukraine, the subsequent Budget Revision widened the operation to neighboring countries as the high number of Ukrainian refugees abroad had to be addressed as well. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the focus will lie on the response within Ukraine addressing host populations and IDPs.<sup>89</sup> The operation within the borders of Ukraine is concretized by the following activities:

Table 2: WFP activities in Ukraine

Strategic Outcome	Activity	Action	Cost (USD) <sup>90</sup>
SO1	Activity 1	Provide emergency food assistance to crisis-affected populations.	1,708,435,814
SO2	Activity 2	Provide technical assistance through the Logistics Cluster to counterparts and partners to improve emergency logistics coordination and supply chain management.	21,632,477
SO2	Activity 3	Provide technical assistance through the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster to counterparts and other partners to improve emergency communication infrastructure and coordination mechanisms.	

<sup>88</sup> World Food Programme, Limited Emergency Operation – Ukraine 2022, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> World Food Programme, Ukraine Budget Revision 1 – March 2022, pp. 1-2.

<sup>90</sup> SO1 addresses multiple activities in neighboring countries as well, in sum, these account for nearly 1.95 billion USD. However, this table only lists the activities taking place within Ukraine.

SO2	Activity 4	Provide on-demand services to humanitarian and development partners.	
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Source: Author’s illustration based on information provided in: WFP, Limited Emergency Operation – Ukraine 2022, pp. 5-7, and WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 12.

Certain transfer modalities have been chosen to implement activity one. As described, the volatile security situation as well as the infrastructural challenges demand a flexible emergency response. Therefore, the WFP has chosen to respond through in-kind food assistance as well as cash-based transfers. Each modality established an objective of reaching 2.35 million affected individuals. Moreover, the WFP’s intention was to expand the scope of the CBT modality, given that cash transfers are logistically more easily feasible and simultaneously support the local economy as well as enable beneficiaries to consume food based on their own preferences.<sup>91</sup> As described above, the Logistics Cluster as well as the ETC do not provide direct assistance. Therefore, no direct beneficiary target exists, rendering monitoring and measuring of results more complex. However, the official reporting on cooperation will provide the basis in the analysis.

## Analysis

The preceding section described the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Subsequently, the WFP’s response will be analyzed. Based on the five criteria issue to a scale-up activation outlined in section three, this analysis will assess the two elements *urgency* and *risk of failure to deliver effectively and at scale to affected populations* in greater detail as they become visible in WFP’s response. Firstly, it will be examined whether the response of the WFP was timely. Secondly, it will be measured whether the response was conducted effectively. For both points, certain indicators will be outlined ahead of the analysis to measure the achieved results. In the case of Ukraine, the WFP has shared an end-of-year evaluation, namely the Annual Country Report (ACR), which provides a detailed description of and reflection on the implemented operation in 2022. Along with other publications this document will provide the basis for this analysis. Due to limited space, other aspects that are crucial to understanding the humanitarian operation in Ukraine cannot be dealt with. These include advocacy among donor governments and humanitarian access negotiations with the Ukrainian Government as well as the Russian Federation.

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<sup>91</sup> World Food Programme, Ukraine Budget Revision 4 – August 2022, p. 2.

### First part – timeliness of the operation

The inquiry into the timeliness of assistance may seem vague, yet it covers a sensitive matter with which the United Nations system is oftentimes confronted with. In the past, many crises have not received sufficient attention and thereby, they lack funding. In consequence, humanitarian UN agencies find themselves either unable to respond, inadequately addressing the situation, or frequently encountering delays in their response efforts.<sup>92</sup>

Indicators that can help exemplify the element of timeliness are response time as well as resource mobilization. In the case of Ukraine, both indicators can be measured based on publicly available documentation. Looking into resource mobilization, important factors are the mobilization of personnel and the procurement of essential supplies, next to the mobilization of funding. As mentioned, the WFP did not have a presence in Ukraine since 2017. Therefore, in the tense political weeks leading up to the Russian escalation, the UN agency was focused on inter-agency and internal contingency planning in anticipation of potential involvement, should the need arise.

In this period, the WFP Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (RBC) was tasked with the planning of the emergency response in case of a Russian escalation. Ukraine fell under the RBC's authority as an oversight country within the RBC region. Therefore, the bureau created a WFP preparedness team, equipped with personnel from different sectors. The purpose of the team was to draft an initial response plan in case of armed hostilities as well as to re-establish relationships with the Ukrainian HCT and potential implementing partners.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, a crucial aim of the team was to revitalize the partnership with the Ukrainian Government, recognizing that the WFP's operational presence in the country hinged upon obtaining formal authorization.

At first, the team worked remotely from the RBC bureau's presence in Cairo. However, when tensions did not ease, the team was deployed to Kyiv and soon received further support from additional staff.<sup>94</sup> This effort must not be underestimated as the WFP, a non-profit humanitarian organization, is subject to budgetary constraints and cannot easily employ large quantities of staff.

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<sup>92</sup> “Darfur: U.N. Backtracks in Sudan Resolution”. In: Human Rights Watch. Date of last revision: 18 November 2004. URL: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/11/18/darfur-un-backtracks-sudan-resolution> (last accessed 26 May 2023).

<sup>93</sup> UN agencies usually contract external partners that already have an established presence on the ground or a shared business experience with the respective agency in order to implement parts of the agency's operation. For example, an NGO could be contracted to transport and / or distribute in-kind food assistance. “Partnering with WFP – for NGOs”. In: World Food Programme.

URL: <https://www.wfp.org/partnering-with-wfp-for-ngos> (last accessed 26 May 2023).

<sup>94</sup> World Food Programme, Limited Emergency Operation – Ukraine 2022, p. 4.

During the first days of the escalation, the agency deployed over 100 employees to the neighboring countries.<sup>95</sup> Within the remainder of 2022, the WFP succeeded in establishing a Country Office presence in Kyiv, along with three Field Offices in Lviv, Dnipro and Odesa. Warehouses, to store food supplies, were established in Lviv, Dnipro, Odesa and Kropyvnytskyi.<sup>96</sup> National, as well as international staff, were hired and trained to work in this challenging context. By the end of the year, most of the staff consisted of national personnel, presenting a valuable opportunity to generate local employment prospects amidst the backdrop of economic decline.<sup>97</sup> By the end of the year, the WFP had contracted eight NGOs to increase its implementation capacity. Four of them are local NGOs, which strengthens local capacity building as well as the local economy.<sup>98</sup>

The timely mobilization of funding in the context of resource mobilization, is a precondition for all other actions. If funding cannot be made available, the agency cannot reach beneficiaries or must cut the size of its assistance. In its LEO and subsequent BRs, the WFP outlined its funding requirements in a structured and transparent way. Further, the documents aim to provide a comprehensive outline of the funding requirements for the respective activities. As described in section four, frequent updates were shared emphasizing the increased costs as the humanitarian situation continuously deteriorated. The revisions hint at the sheer scope of Russia's aggression and thus, the unpredictability of the emerging humanitarian crisis.

In the ACR, the WFP reflects on the value of its funding partnerships, outlining that the United States funded 55 percent of the operation in Ukraine and thereby, being its most significant donor. Further, the ACR describes that private sector donors in total have made the second largest contribution. This underscores the profound global interest in the conflict and conveys their concern. Other significant donors were Germany, Canada and the European Commission, in total these five contributors allocated 80 percent of the funding the WFP received.<sup>99</sup> Examining the ACR's assessment of the funding situation reveals disparities between the projected funding needs and the actual expenditure. As described in section four, the WFP set its budgetary requirements at nearly 1.95 billion USD. However, the actual expenditure amounted to 760 million USD (while describing that 820 million USD had been made available in resources in 2022). This gap of almost 1.2 billion USD may be partly explicable as many of the activities in neighboring countries, which were not further specified in this paper, were not conducted. However, a total of

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<sup>95</sup> World Food Programme, External Situation Report – 3 March 2022, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> World Food Programme, External Situation Report – 5 May 2023, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.



1 billion USD was not spent on activity one, which is not further explained. Reasons could be that the funding was spent after the end of the year but it is not transparently laid out for an external reader of the ACR and therefore, it remains up to speculation.<sup>100</sup>

Evaluating the response time is a straightforward task, as the indicator of its effectiveness lies in describing the speed at which the operation was first initiated and implemented. The above paragraph already outlined the timely creation of an emergency preparedness team that was deployed to Ukraine before the escalation of hostilities. By 10 March 2022, the response in Ukraine was activated through the distribution of 2,000 value vouchers in Lviv. This falls under the modality of cash-based transfers, whereby supermarkets are provided with supplies which can be claimed through vouchers. Of course, this modality is only operational in those areas, that still have functioning supply chains and markets.<sup>101</sup> By 14 March, 35.2 mt of bread were distributed by a WFP implementing partner to beneficiaries in Kharkiv. Other food commodities were being transported to Dnipro from where they were scheduled to be redistributed further.<sup>102</sup> Considering that the WFP had just established its presence in Ukraine, this demonstrated the agency's determination to immediately support the Ukrainian population. Despite the seemingly random nature of the initial aid delivery, the uncertainties of war hinder the attainment of logistical perfection, especially for humanitarian actors operating under significant security risks.

Regarding the volatile security context in Ukraine, organizations' efforts to deliver assistance timely were challenged and continue to be challenged by multiple factors: halt of air travel, damages to road and railway infrastructure, lack of fuel, volatile security context through active fighting as well as mines or unexploded ordnance, and lastly, no access in areas that are no longer under Ukrainian-Government control. For example, humanitarian agencies were only able to provide limited assistance in Mariupol and Kherson despite the inhabitants' struggle to meet even basic needs. Therefore, humanitarian organizations have adjusted their approach. They have employed various modalities, such as providing cash or in-kind assistance and using both direct delivery and established networks, to effectively reach people in need. Nevertheless, the HCT along with the respective UN agencies and organs continues to call for access to the people most in need.<sup>103</sup> Subsequent Situation Reports demonstrate the gradual development and expansion of the WFP's operation, marked by increased organization and scale.

## Second part – effectiveness of the operation

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-14.

<sup>101</sup> World Food Programme, External Situation Report – 10 March 2022, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> World Food Programme, External Situation Report – 14 March 2022, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022, pp. 11-12 and p. 14.

The second part of the analysis will investigate whether the response was conducted effectively. To evaluate this, the analysis will outline the transparency of the WFP's emergency response approach, including the implementation of accountability mechanisms for affected populations. In addition, the following paragraphs will line out the coordination within the HCT, specifically outlining the collaboration within the three different WFP-led clusters.

Looking into the indicators of transparency and accountability first, the multitude of publicly available documents enhances the ability to track the development of the operation – from a financial perspective as well as through the lenses of the operational rollout. The fact that all Situation Reports, operational planning reports (LEO, BR) as well as the ACR are not only made available internally or to donors but can be accessed externally through the WFP homepage signifies an effort to enhance transparency. Certainly, when reading through the documents, some discrepancies in figures or unclarity in wording become apparent. Above, the divergences in the funding figures were outlined. Additionally, the wording around beneficiary figures differs depending on the document and only relying on the LEO, BRs or the ACR respectively, would not sufficiently clarify how many beneficiaries were addressed per month. For example, the ACR outlines that in total, the WFP assisted 10.3 million people through food and cash deliveries in 2022.<sup>104</sup> However, the BR states, that the WFP plans to reach 4.7 million beneficiaries up until December 2022.<sup>105</sup> Hence, some ambiguity remains regarding the calculation of the respective figures in relation to the timeline of the operation in 2022.

By introducing the principle of accountability to affected populations, the WFP ensures that beneficiaries of their assistance can communicate their opinion as well as priorities through safe channels of communication provided by the agency. Rapidly instituting and augmenting the infrastructure for a toll-free phone hotline, the WFP facilitated direct communication with individuals requiring assistance. On a daily basis, the hotline processed nearly 1,500 calls, which are placed in 77 percent of the cases by women. Thereby, the initiative also improved the WFP's grasp of the demographic situation, including information on displacement. In addition, the WFP established partnerships with local human rights organizations to ensure that those communities that are already marginalized in non-conflict contexts receive prioritized access to humanitarian assistance.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 15.

<sup>105</sup> World Food Programme, Ukraine Budget Revision 4 – August 2022, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, p. 21.

Furthermore, the indicator of coordination shall serve as an element to describe whether the operation was conducted effectively. Enhanced coordination among the operating UN agencies is important as it can streamline their efforts and avoid duplications (addressing the same beneficiaries rather than different areas) and hence, unnecessary costs. Therefore, as described under section three, the IASC Cluster Approach was activated.

The respective cluster leads are responsible and held accountable for the effective coordination and collaboration among the various stakeholders. The FSL Cluster is co-lead by the WFP and the FAO. It ensured that food insecure people received the assistance they needed. In total, 70 organizations were managed under this cluster to ensure that food assistance could be consolidated and that different organizations would not address the same beneficiaries and rather cover as many regions in Ukraine as possible. As discussed in section four in table 1, the FSL Cluster planned to target 5.2 million people. However, official end-of-year reporting shows that the cluster effectively reached 11.8 million Ukrainians through food assistance.<sup>107</sup> As this depicts an increase of 6.6 million beneficiaries, it cannot be argued that it may be due to minor discrepancies in reporting. Moreover, it may be evident that, although the cluster seems to be operating beyond expectations, the coordination of figures is patchy. Consequently, it remains unclear to the external reader how exactly these figures are calculated.

Furthermore, the indicators specified under the respective FSL (Annex 1) and the WFP activities (Annex 2) differ in wording. Therefore, it appears as though the entities phrased their operational plans independently of each other which is surprising as the FSL Cluster is co-led by the WFP. However, if the respective UN organizations were to adapt the formulation of their indicators to the formulations of the cluster, it would be easier to understand what contribution the respective organization has made towards the target indicators.

Furthermore, the WFP leads both the Logistics Cluster as well as the ETC. For the Logistics Cluster, the WFP coordinated 188 organizations active in Ukraine. It managed different warehouse facilities, before it settled on the four warehouses described in the above paragraph. Further, the cluster was responsible for organizing inter-agency convoys into hard-to-reach areas.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, reporting on the funding figures exemplifies strong changes. While initial calculations set the operational cost at over 10 million USD, the end-of year report covering this

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> WFP, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, pp. 18-19.

cluster's activities outlines a lower total expenditure of nearly 4.5 million USD.<sup>109</sup> Again, the lack of comprehensive information hinders a thorough understanding of the underlying factors contributing to this disparity.

When examining the third WFP-led cluster, the ACR outlines that the ETC facilitated a total of 285 humanitarian organizations in their operational response. The ETC extended its services to five urban centers encompassing Dnipro, Lviv, Kyiv, Mukachevo, and Odesa, ensuring seamless connectivity for humanitarian operations. In line with observations on the other clusters, figures are not congruent across reports. While initial calculations suggested an operational cost of 3.2 million USD, the end-of year report covering this cluster's activities outlines a lower total expenditure of 1.4 million USD. Also in this case, the lack of explanation allows no insight into this expenditure gap.<sup>110</sup>

Whereas the Logistics Cluster and ETC find specific mention in the ACR along with a detailed concretization of the achievement of their targets, it is not specifically stated in what relation the WFP's food assistance stands to the overall contribution under the FSL Cluster. This could be easily improved to enhance transparency in future reporting.

## **Conclusion**

The Humanitarian Country Team in Ukraine faced a major requirement for scale-up upon the onset of the Russian escalation on 24 February 2022. Hereby, the World Food Programme played a major role in responding to the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Tasked with three UN cluster leads and the re-establishment its own presence in the country, the WFP's operation serves as a good example to measure the timeliness and effectiveness with which humanitarian agencies rolled out their operations in Ukraine.

Overall, the WFP's operation was successful with respect to the indicator of timeliness. Given the rapidity with which the WFP established a presence in Ukraine, along with creating an operational response plan and the infrastructure to implement the operation, this indicator seems to have been achieved very well. The WFP's assistance was delivered in a timely manner despite the challenging security situation and the uncertainty over the course of the war. Different modalities were adapted to improve the response to the unfolding security context.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

Regarding the operational effectiveness, the WFP's approach was mostly transparent and the coordination among the WFP-led clusters seems to have been effective. On the element of transparency, all relevant information is publicly accessible, offering greater insights compared to many governmental institutions. However, certain challenges persist, such as discrepancies in funding and beneficiary figure reporting which complicates understanding the operation fully from an external perspective. The WFP promotes its objective of being accountable to the populations it serves along with integrating accountability mechanisms within its policies and practices. Hence, there is a need to enhance the reporting of figures to enhance the comprehensibility of the WFP's calculations.

While the coordination within the respective clusters has seemed to increase collaboration among the active UN agencies and NGOs, the reporting on the funding figures lacks detail and specification. Supposedly, the discrepancies may have been communicated to donors. From an external standpoint, however, it forfeits transparency and hence, links in with the critique stated in the previous paragraph.

As the Russian aggression in Ukraine is ongoing, the final impact of the humanitarian community's actions cannot be measured yet. Certainly, the operations of UN agencies as well as NGOs are easing the hardship faced by Ukrainian people. However, donor funding as well as a continuation of advocacy efforts to enable humanitarian access is of utmost importance to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those areas in the country that are most affected by the ongoing hostilities and where people struggle most to provide for their basic needs. The HCT must continue its efforts to raise awareness for these people through transparent reporting, using all levels of the UN system, including the General Assembly as well as the UN Secretary General's diplomatic power.

It is crucial for Western governments to recognize that in addition to providing military assistance, they must also continue and increase their financial support to humanitarian organizations working in Ukraine. Such support not only alleviates the ongoing hardships faced by Ukrainians but also enhances their resilience in effectively countering the Russian war of aggression.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: FSL Cluster Activities

Strategic Objective	Activity	Indicator	Need	Target
SO1	Distribution of in-kind food assistance	# of individuals receiving in-kind food assistance to ensure their immediate access to food	9,332,000	3,643,000
SO1	Provision of market-based relief vouchers	# of individuals receiving market-based relief vouchers to ensure their immediate access to food	9,332,000	404,000
SO1	Provision of inputs for cereal crop production (wheat, rye) – seed, fertilizer, plant protection products	# of household provided with farm or garden inputs	9,332,000	250,000
SO1	Provision of inputs for vegetable production – seed, fertilizer, plant protection; this is a winterization activity	# of households provided or supported	9,332,000	250,000
SO1	Provision of livestock and poultry production inputs and services, including animal feed and mineral/ vitamin supplements; this is a winterization activity	# of individuals provided or supported with livestock/poultry feed and mineral supplements kits disaggregated by age and gender.	9,332,000	235,000
SO1	Cash/inputs for farmers to support winterization	# of individuals receiving cash and agriculture livelihood support disaggregated by age and gender	9,332,000	104,000
SO1	Cash or voucher assistance for the repair of livestock shelter damaged by the conflict	# of individuals supported with cash or vouchers to repair livestock shelters disaggregated by age and gender	9,332,000	156,000
SO1	Provision of animal health supplies and services; this is a winterization activity	# of individuals provided or support with veterinary inputs for their animals disaggregated by age and gender	9,332,000	156,000
SO1	Repair of grain and vegetable storage damaged by the conflict	# of individuals supported with repairs of their grain and vegetable storage disaggregated by age and gender	9,332,000	100,000
SO1	Distribution of grain storage facilities	# of individual farmers receiving grain storage facilities	9,332,000	35,200
SO1	Addressing lost income through rapid reskilling, vocational training programmes and job creation	# of individuals receiving new professional skills and competencies and employed - disaggregated by age and gender	9,332,000	5,000
SO1	Support to job creation by small businesses through grants/income generation provision of equipment and tools	# of small businesses supported with grants/income generation activities disaggregated by women and men led small businesses	9,332,000	4,000

Source: OCHA, Ukraine Flash Appeal – August 2022 – Annex, pp. 4-5.

### Annex 2: WFP Activity 1 with specifications

Activity 01: Provide emergency food assistance to crisis-affected populations in Ukraine
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Detailed indicator	Unit of measure	Planned	Actual
A.1: Beneficiaries receiving cash-based transfers	People	2,200,000	2,270,124
A.1: Beneficiaries receiving food transfers (All)	People	2,200,000	8,079,012
A.1: Beneficiaries receiving food transfers (Children)	People	158,055	315,163
A.2: Food transfers	Mt	282,763	154,113
A.3: Cash-based transfers	USD	1,007,813,941	378,880,333
A.6.11: Number of institutional sites assisted	Site	10	11
A.7.1: Number of retailers participating in cash-based transfer programmes	Retailer	1	1
B.2.1: Quantity of specialized nutritious foods provided	Mt	1,300	952.7

Source: World Food Programme, Ukraine Annual Country Report – 2022, pp. 31-32.