



## Country brief: **Ukraine**

### **Conflict**

The conflict in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, which covers areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (provinces), began in 2014. Following rising tensions in the region, pro-Russian separatist groups declared independence and Ukrainian government forces have since fought to regain control.

### **Key environmental issues**

The Donbas region has a 200 year history of coal mining and heavy industry, prior to the conflict, pollution was widespread and the region's industrial past has heavily influenced the environmental problems linked to the conflict. Cuts in electricity supplies and disruption from the conflict have led to the breakdown of water pumps in coal mines, leading to flooding and groundwater pollution. The use of heavy weapons has carried with it risks of serious pollution incidents from sensitive industrial facilities and civilian infrastructure.

Waste management systems have been severely degraded and overwhelmed by conflict debris, pollution from munitions residues is suspected and a range of environmental services have been impacted by the conflict. The region's ecosystems and natural resources have also been affected, with agricultural areas degraded, and forests and protected areas damaged by felling, fires, mining, and military activities.

### **In figures**

Large industrial facilities in the Donbas region	<b>900</b>
Industrial facilities operating in Donbas region in 2013	<b>5500</b>
Accidents and operational disruptions recorded at industrial sites 2014-17	<b>&gt;500</b>
Industrial sites close to the line of contact and at risk from the fighting	<b>75</b>
Water supply facilities close to the line of contact at risk from the fighting	<b>12</b>
Total number of mines in eastern Ukraine	<b>227</b>
Mines believed to be flooded on both sides of the line of contact	<b>36</b>
Tonnes of stored industrial waste in Donbas region (including mine waste)	<b>10bn</b>
Protected natural areas in the conflict zone	<b>135</b>
Protected areas known to have been damaged	<b>60</b>

Sources: UN-EU-World Bank, OSCE

## International and domestic response

Concerns over the environmental risks associated with the conflict were first raised by domestic and international NGOs in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, a number of governmental, international and NGO entities have sought to document and collate environmental data on the conflict.<sup>2</sup> The health and environmental risks from damage to industrial and water purification facilities continue to be of particular concern.<sup>3</sup> Both Ukraine and the separatist groups have acknowledged these hazards and the wider environmental problems linked to the conflict. Many hazards, such as groundwater pollution from flooded mines, or industrial accidents, have the potential to affect wide areas and could therefore be a point of cooperation across the line of contact. The OSCE, which monitors the conflict, is increasingly seeking to address its environmental dimensions.

UN agencies and the authorities on both sides have ongoing programmes to repair and maintain basic environmental services, such as waste management, water and energy supplies. However, a lack of comprehensive field data in the areas affected is limiting efforts to precisely determine the conflict's environmental impact, and any associated humanitarian risks. As such there is an urgent need to restore pre-conflict environmental monitoring systems.

In 2016, the Ukrainian government tabled a resolution on conflict and the environment at the UN Environment Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

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## Further reading

Zoi Environment Network (2011) Coal land:

[https://issuu.com/zoienvironment/docs/coalland\\_screen](https://issuu.com/zoienvironment/docs/coalland_screen)

UN-EU-World Bank (2015) Ukraine Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment:

[http://www.un.org.ua/images/stories/RPA\\_V2\\_Eng\\_4Web\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.un.org.ua/images/stories/RPA_V2_Eng_4Web_lowres.pdf)

OSCE (2017) Environmental Assessment and Recovery Priorities for Eastern Ukraine:

<http://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-ukraine/363556>

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1. Zoi/TRW Project (2015) The Ukraine conflict's legacy of environmental damage and pollutants:

<http://www.toxicremnantsofwar.info/ukraine-conflict-environmental-damage-and-pollutants/>

2. TRW Project/Zoi (2017) Monitoring the monitors studying the Ukraine conflict's environmental impact:

<http://www.toxicremnantsofwar.info/monitoring-the-monitors-studying-the-ukraine-conflicts-environmental-impact/>

3. OHCHR (2017) UN experts warn of chemical disaster and water safety risk as conflict escalates in East:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22382&LangID=E>

4. TRW Project (2016) UNEA-2 passes most significant UN resolution on conflict and the environment since 1992:

<http://www.toxicremnantsofwar.info/unea-2-passes-most-significant-un-resolution-on-conflict-and-the-environment-since-1992>