

# Left behind

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This is the fifth year that Eastern Ukraine has been ravaged by conflict. Pro-Russian separatist forces and the Ukrainian army clash in a war of positions. The peace process is at a standstill and the conflict has largely been erased from the media. The trenches forming the front line have carved a wound over 450 km long, crossing one of the most densely populated areas of the country. The positions of the two enemy camps delimit the "grey zone": a corridor of land several hundred kilometers long and 200 meters wide, more than 5 kilometers apart. This danger zone where shooting is daily, seems to be a no man's land but people live there.

Last inhabitants of deserted villages, they survive in partially destroyed houses, in a very often mined environment. Access to water and electricity many times cut, they are left behind. Cut off from the world, exposed to shelling, sniper fire, but also cold, hunger, loneliness ... Many of them are retired, they could not leave because financially it was impossible. With a pension of 1200 to 1500 Hryvnias (38 euros) monthly, they are unable to rent a home elsewhere. For most of them their home and garden are their only means of livelihood.

Out of the reach of NGOs, they receive a little supply of food by passing soldiers and by the CIMIC (Civil-military co-operation). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is one of the few NGOs constantly present on the front. Their teams try to help the people near the line of contact but they can not penetrate beyond. Crossfire continues to kill many people: 569 civilian casualties in 2017 and 107 person in the first five months of 2018. In total, in May 2018, there were 3 000 deaths and 8 000 injuries among the population. To date, the war in Ukraine has killed more than 10 303 people.

Currently, 200 000 people live within 10 km of the trenches on the Ukrainian side, within range of fire, and about 100 000 people live inside the grey zone.

According to the latest International Crisis Group report of 1 October 2018, a total of 800 000 civilians would be in both situations on both sides of the front line. Behind a forgotten war that many say is frozen, hides an unknown but important humanitarian crisis. The seasons pass but the personal situations remain the same...