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**UKRAINE**

# UKRAINE CONFIDENCE BUILDING INITIATIVE

**SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT  
JANUARY 2015 – JULY 2015**

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# ACRONYMS

CSO	civil society organization
DPR	Donetsk People’s Republic
GMU	grants management unit
IDP	internally displaced person
IT	information technology
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PMU	program management unit
UCBI	Ukraine Confidence Building Initiative
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) launched the Ukraine Confidence Building Initiative (UCBI) in July 2014 in response to the socio-political upheaval facing the country in the wake of the Euro-Maidan Revolution, Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea, and mass displacement of people caused by a Russian instigated armed conflict in the country's East. Given this context, the Ukraine Confidence Building Initiative (UCBI) was started to complement ongoing USAID efforts to support a successful democratic transition and promote national cohesion in the wake of the conflict in the East.

Over the reporting period, UCBI continued to direct its efforts at its target regions of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, and targeted cities in the liberated areas of Luhansk and Donetsk. The program maintains two project offices, with project leadership, two GMUs, and administrative teams based in Kyiv, and a second technical and administrative team based in Kharkiv City. The team in Kyiv is responsible for overall management of the program, nationally focused activities, and all sub-national efforts in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, and other strategic initiatives across Ukraine. The team in Kharkiv is focused on the Kharkiv Oblast, (which currently supports the greatest numbers of IDPs), as well as activities in the liberated areas of Northern Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

UCBI assistance comes in the form of small in-kind grants (goods, services, and technical support) and fixed amount awards to a range of partners, including national and local civilian government entities, civil society organizations, and community leaders. UCBI provides targeted assistance in vulnerable communities in order to:

Enable communities and government at the local and national level to mitigate deepened social tensions threatening Ukraine's political transition; and

Increase access to information and inform public debate on issues related to the conflict and its impact

### UCBI Program Areas

Through the periodic assessments conducted with the project team, UCBI focused on five program areas over this reporting period, which formed the basis of program level analysis, monitoring, and evaluation for the UCBI program. The five program areas include:

- Reduce tensions around competition for limited resources
- Integrate IDPs in host communities and enable them to engage in public life
- Foster civic activism to improve morale, confidence, and resilience
- Foster civic participation and constructive engagement between government and citizens
- Increase access to objective information and reduce vulnerability to manipulative information

## UKRAINE COUNTRY CONTEXT

In late 2013, mass protests against the pro-Russian politics of the former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich triggered his ouster, followed by the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea and military conflict in the East of Ukraine. In response to declarations of unrecognized Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics through illegal referendums in spring 2014, a newly-formed pro-reform government of Ukraine launched a full-scale military Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) against the separatists. In late May 2014, Ukraine elected Petro Poroshenko, a pro-reform billionaire, as the new Ukrainian President who has been steadily pushing for a solution to the crisis in the East. Since the conflict broke out in early 2014, ongoing fighting has resulted in more than 6,500 deaths and massive internal displacement of civilians. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of IDPs in Ukraine in February 2015 reached over one million. In June 2015, OCHA estimates this number reached more than 1.38 million people, representing the largest displacement of people in Europe since the Balkan wars. The majority of these individuals are living in Eastern Oblasts close to the conflict areas, such as Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Northern Donetsk. Numerous attempts to broker an end to the conflict have been unsuccessful as various ceasefire agreements – commonly referred as Minsk I and II - were largely ignored. A selection of critical events describing UCBI programming context are highlighted below.

- Donetsk offensive in mid-winter 2015

Following the fragile Minsk I ceasefire agreement, signed by the Ukrainian government and separatists in September 2014, fighting in the East intensified in the winter months. On January 21, 2015, separatist forces captured the symbolically important Donetsk International Airport, the last part of the city of Donetsk that had been under Ukrainian control. Following this victory, pro-Russian rebels pressed their offensive on to the important railway and road junction of Debaltseve and pushed towards the strategic port of Mariupol. In the attack on Mariupol on January 24, 2015, at least 30 civilians were killed and 83 were injured by rockets fired from long-range missile systems. In response to these numerous attacks, the government of Ukraine announced a counteroffensive in early February 2015, which led to another deadly attack carried out by the separatists using the same multiple rocket launchers in the city of Kramatorsk. This attack took the lives of seven civilians and injured another 16, including two children.

- Minsk II agreement and ceasefire violations

The renewed heavy fighting in mid-winter caused significant concern in the international community. In response to the collapse of the Minsk I agreement in January-February 2015, a new package of measures was intended to revive the ceasefire. Signed by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany in February 2015, the Minsk II agreement involved the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, amnesty for prisoners involved in fighting, and the lifting of restrictions in rebel areas of Ukraine. Though fighting generally subsided after the ceasefire came into effect, skirmishes and shelling continued in several parts of the conflict zone.

As also specified by Minsk II, in March 2015, the Parliament of Ukraine approved a law granting “special status” for the occupied territories. Representatives of the Donetsk and

Luhansk people's republics said that the law was a "one-sided" modification to Minsk II and that the agreement had been rendered void by this modification.

- Government legislative response to the IDP crisis

In spring 2014, the newly-formed Ukrainian government was not prepared to tackle the problem of the rapidly growing IDP population and could not provide proper legislation to protect their rights and address emerging needs. As a result, IDPs could not register in their new place of residence, which hindered their ability to receive social payments, participate in elections, enter schools and universities, and receive necessary governmental support. As the number of IDPs and those seeking refuge abroad kept increasing and reaching catastrophic proportions, the government was challenged to provide more regulations on IDPs' social protection. In late October 2014, the Ukrainian Parliament passed legislation to provide guarantees of rights and freedoms of IDPs and establish a Unified IDP State Registry to facilitate new residency registration. In addition, the Law on the Rights and Freedoms of IDPs endorsed cooperation with international organizations in supporting IDPs.

In March 2015, another law on re-strengthening social protection of IDPs was adopted. The law expanded the range of citizens who would have the right to receive a voucher from the State Employment Service. This voucher allows IDPs to apply for professional re-training and advanced vocational training seminars on nationally prioritized economic specialties in order to facilitate transfer to a new working place or expand their job search opportunities.

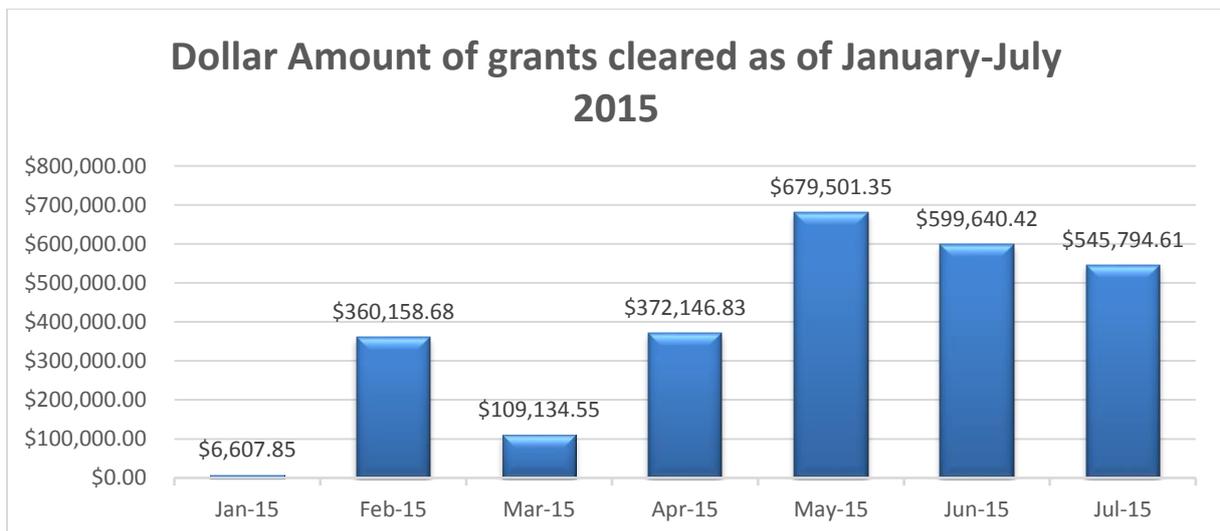
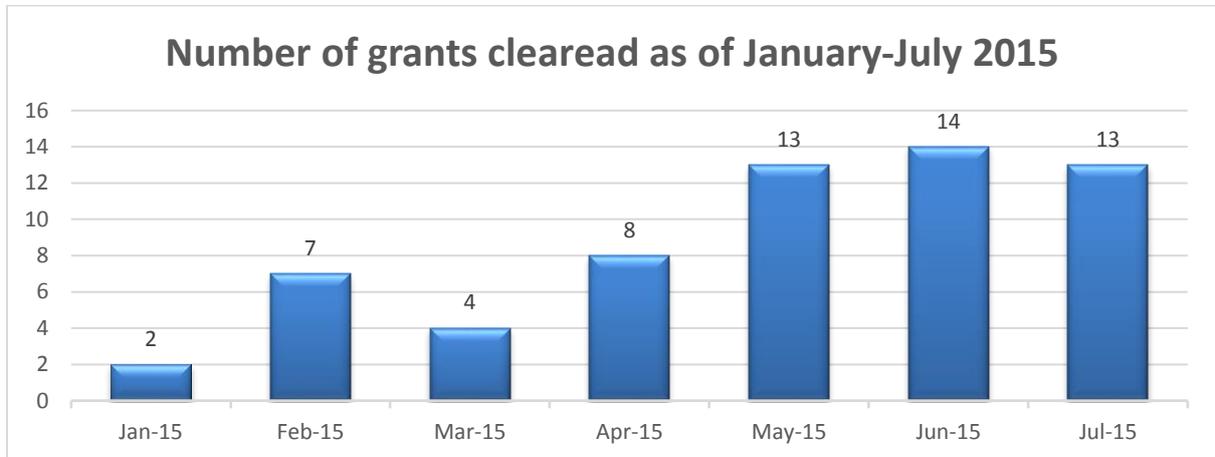
- Upcoming local elections 2015

The electoral systems used to elect local councils and mayors in Ukraine have been criticized for being prone to fraud and abuse and for yielding unrepresentative results. In response, five of six leading political parties signed a Coalition Agreement in November 2014 to adopt a hybrid electoral system that combines the existing majority (first-past-the-post) system for village and settlement councils with a proportional open list system for elections at other levels. The Coalition Agreement also called for mayors in "large" cities to be elected through a two-round system, so that a candidate could not win with only a small plurality of votes. The elections will be conducted a little over a year since the 2014 snap local elections triggered by Yanukovich's ouster. The 2014 presidential and parliamentary elections were only held in certain parts of the country due to the occupation of Crimea and continuing unrest in the eastern oblasts.

The upcoming local elections are scheduled for October 25, 2015 and will likely not be held in the occupied regions of Ukraine. Since May 2015, four separate draft local election laws have been introduced to the legislature, of which the draft law under reg. no. 2831-3 has preliminarily been adopted but not yet passed, however a second reading is under consideration. The four proposed drafts all eliminate the existing parallel system for local council elections, which has been widely blamed for recurring irregularities in local elections and for a lack of representativeness in local councils. Rules allowing IDP voting have yet to be passed, and many civil society groups have been advocating for a change to the regulations which would enable IDPs to vote.

## GRANTS SUMMARY

From January 1, 2015 through July 31, 2015, UCBI funded a total of 61 activities, including cleared and completed grants, short-term technical assistance (STTA), and direct distribution of goods and services (DDGS), for a committed total of \$2,672,984.29



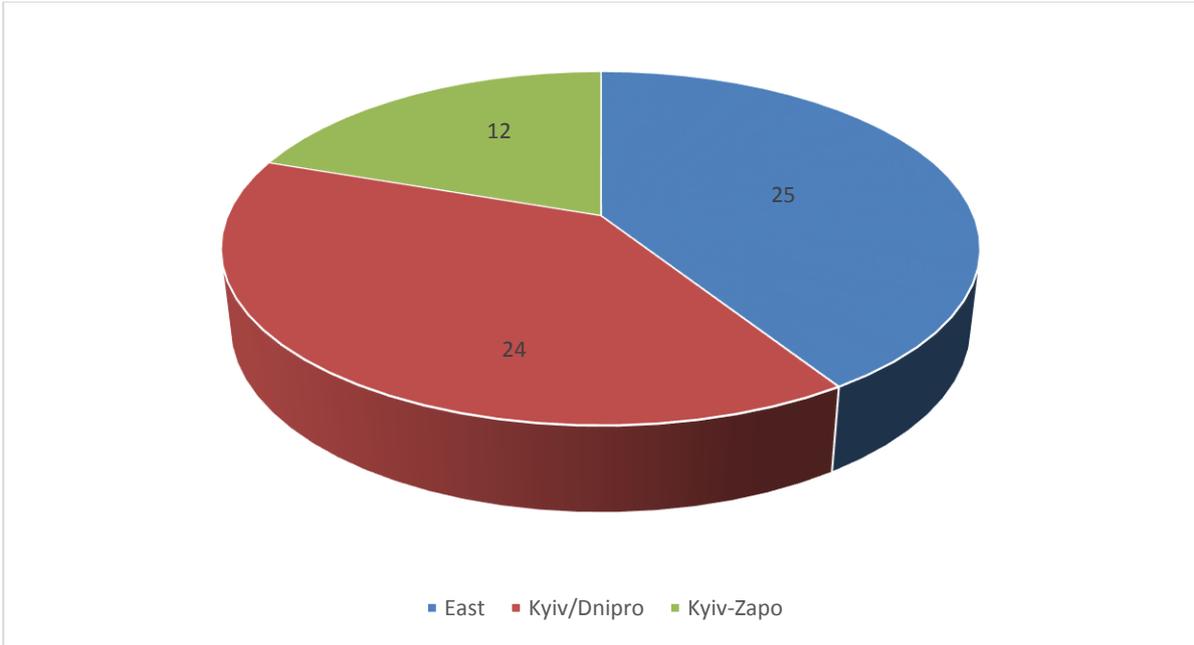


Figure 1 Number of grants cleared as of January-July 2015

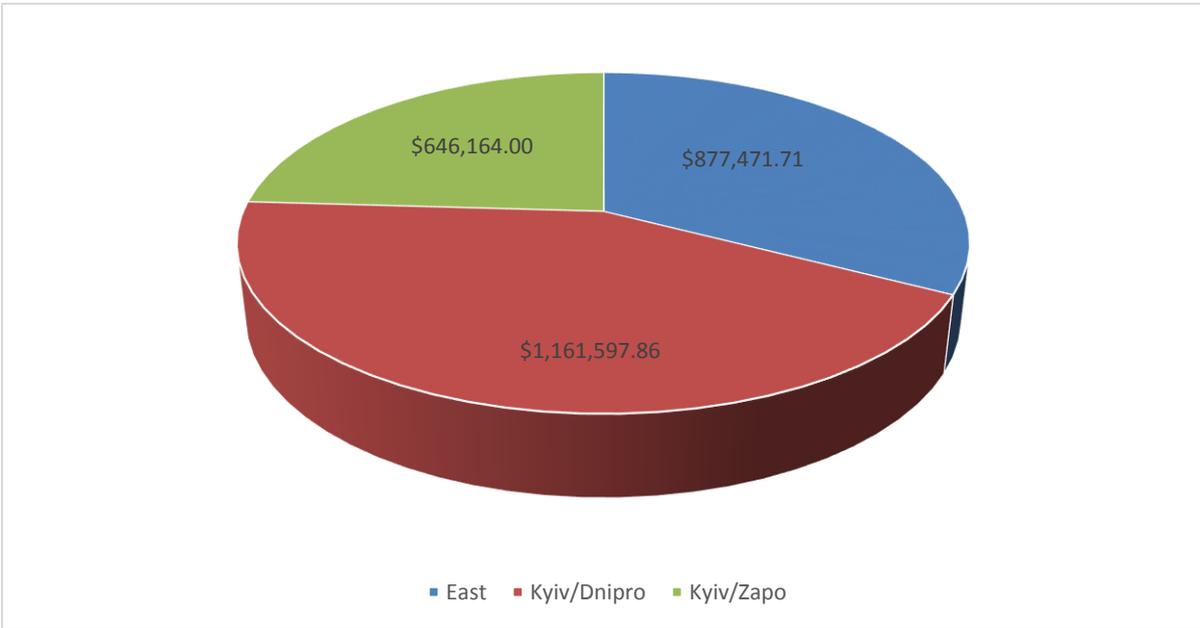


Figure 2 Dollar amount of grants cleared as of January-July 2015

## ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

From January to July 2015, UCBI continued to address the ongoing political crisis through the design and implementation of strategic assistance and partnership at the local and national levels. UCBI work in Eastern Ukraine, focusing on population centers in the regions close to the conflict area, which have been targeted by external aggression. The program currently operates in Kharkiv Oblast, and the liberated areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. During the reporting period, UCBI expanded its regional focus, actively programming in the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. During the reporting period, UCBI issued grants to more than 50 partners – NGOs, civic initiatives, state and local authorities, community leaders - at the international, national and local levels. UCBI activities illustrating program impact in the program’s five focus areas are highlighted below.

### **Program Area 1: Reduce tensions around competition for limited resources**

One of the many outcomes of the mass movement of IDPs into new communities has been an increased struggle for limited resources and government services available to vulnerable groups. This creates potential for tensions and conflicts between IDPs and host communities. UCBI worked with its partners to provide citizens in targeted regions with information about the availability of jobs and government benefits. Activities also aimed to increase citizen access to critical resources, such as seminars about entrepreneurship, basic legal literacy, computer skills, and job search skills.

#### **Illustrative activities:**

According to a specialist on employment assistance, “As many IDPs decide to stay and settle down in Kharkiv, we need more qualified workers to fill emerging local labor market needs.” Re-training and equipping IDPs with new skills has become a critical need in the Kharkiv community. To address this need, UCBI supported a local organization to conduct 12 computer literacy training courses, reaching 69 unemployed IDPs. “These courses were very impactful and helped bring back the sense of confidence to IDPs,” noted the project coordinator. Trained IDPs were able to apply new skills to online job searching and CV development.

With a population of more than 73,500 IDPs, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast is the second largest recipient of IDPs in Ukraine. A large influx of IDPs has created tensions within the host communities as IDPs place strains on the local economy, have unclear legal status, and are in need of employment. In an effort to mitigate such tensions and address IDP needs, UCBI partnered with a local NGO, to hold an oblast-wide summer training program for IDPs. With UCBI support, the NGO conducted 24 informational seminars about effective employment searching as well as how to launch a business with more than 490 IDPs. Additionally, the NGO provided 108 individual consultations with IDPs about their legal rights. UCBI’s funding also helped the NGO launch a virtual center to provide legal consultations and information on services offered by the State Employment Center for IDPs via Skype. “All those who approached us for assistance are now happy that our partner has launched such service giving an opportunity to solve problems and get legal assistance remotely. This is a great assistance we are receiving,” attested the State Employment Center officer.

Another project partner organized training seminars for IDPs to acquire soft, professional, and IT skills in an effort to increase their employment opportunities in new host

communities. UCBI supported the provision of training and counseling services in Kyiv as well as the scaling up of activities in the cities of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk. From April to July 2015 the partner conducted a series of trainings on sales, social media marketing, and tourism to more than 690 IDPs. The partner also offered participants access to 1,350 job vacancies throughout Ukraine.

## **Program Area 2: Integrate IDPs in host communities and enable them to engage in public life**

During the reporting period, UCBI worked on a number of activities focused on providing IDPs with opportunities to build relationships with their host communities and address negative and potentially destabilizing stereotypes. Activities in this program area aimed to promote IDP resilience by breaking down misconceptions among members of the IDP and host communities. This served to help identify commonalities and connectors in order to achieve greater community cohesion.

### **Illustrative activities:**

Another project partner has become instrumental in providing information and key services in Kharkiv Oblast, which has an IDP population of more than 175,000 people. UCBI was the first international donor to support this partner building its communication and outreach capacity. Since summer 2014, partner volunteers have been collecting information from local government, civil society, and voluntary groups about services available to IDPs in Kharkiv. UCBI supported the production and distribution of 15,000 informational brochures to IDPs in Kharkiv city addressing their specific and immediate needs. In an effort to address the medium- and long-term adaptation and integration challenges faced by IDPs, UCBI continued to partner with the organization, one of the few voices trusted by IDPs fleeing the conflict, by providing support to leverage their technical capacity. The project partner launched an online information portal for IDPs and developed an adaptation program aiming to reach up to 100 vulnerable IDP families in Kharkiv.

In Dnipropetrovsk, a partner NGO has been putting forth effort to assist newly arrived IDPs since early summer 2014. UCBI furnished, equipped, and upgraded the electrical capacity of the IDP center operated by the NGO. To leverage the organization's capacity to help integrate IDPs in new host communities, UCBI also supported the NGO's initiative to reach target communities with high numbers of IDPs in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast by monitoring conditions and assessing needs. In addition to this grassroots initiative to help mitigate tensions in IDP host communities, UCBI supported another local NGO to facilitate dialogue between community stakeholders by engaging more than 275 IDPs, representatives from host communities, and local government entities in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.

## **Program Area 3: Foster civic activism to improve morale, confidence, and resilience**

UCBI actively engaged with youth, women, the business community, as well as government and non-government community leaders to promote positive interaction through civic advocacy. It became clear that community leaders and civic-minded individuals were eager to contribute to mitigating the adverse outcomes of the conflict in the East; however, they lacked the tools and experience necessary to transform those nascent ideas into civic action. UCBI, therefore, implemented activities that provided tools and platforms for driving community-level change to a broader spectrum of population.

### **Illustrative activities:**

Throughout the reporting period, UCBI supported more than ten grassroots youth initiatives in different regions of Ukraine, encouraging youth civic participation and laying the groundwork for citizen-government engagement. One of these initiatives was the opening of a free and open space for youth in the liberated city of Sloviansk in Donetsk Oblast. Supported by UCBI, it has established a youth and local community center replicating best practices from the cities of Lviv and Kramatorsk. UCBI helped equip the center and supported trainings and workshops, cultural events, civic initiatives, and other extracurricular activities. The opening of the center became a significant community event. Many visitors, including local government representatives, noted that the event was “first of its kind”. One individual involved stated, “It’s the first time I am seeing such a new quality of a community gathering in Sloviansk. Many people who came here today didn’t even know each other earlier, and this platform serves as a great opportunity to enhance civic activism development in our city.”

Continuing its efforts to foster youth activism in the conflict-affected communities, UCBI partnered with an all-Ukrainian youth NGO to hold interactive presentations on civic activism for students in public and private schools, colleges, and lyceums in the liberated areas of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. From March to July 2015, with support from UCBI, the NGO held 60 presentations for school-aged students from 16 local communities. These presentations inspired many school students to organize and actively participate in 16 follow-on projects in their home communities, such as partnerships with local authorities, workshops, and clean-up and beautification activities.

### **Program Area 4: Foster civic participation and constructive engagement between government and citizens**

Grant activities implemented in this activity area were designed to foster greater civic engagement across divided populations and increase constructive engagement between government and its citizens. These activities helped to demonstrate government commitment to improved service delivery and a new relationship with citizens, and directly, engaged civic groups and local government entities to identify shared priorities for their communities and to serve as partners for follow-on UCBI-funded initiatives.

#### **Activities Included:**

Once the conflict started, a reputable higher education institution with well-established IT and vocational training centers was forced to close major aspects of its center in Donetsk and relocated to Kryvyi Rih. As part of broader efforts to support resilience in conflict-affected communities, UCBI provided the organization with 54 new computers and IT equipment for a computer lab and helped refurbish a vocational culinary training classroom with professional kitchenware. Following the renovations, the organization launched hospitality, tourism, and customs curricula, which are new disciplines for Kryvyi Rih schools and will soon launch a distance learning course to support its students in other regions, as well as many of those who remain in the conflict zone. Distance learning is expected to become an efficient instrument for community cohesion and young IDP integration in Kryvyi Rih. The UCBI upgrades and resources helped attract new students to the relocated university and, since the refurbishment, the organization doubled the number of enrolled students from 650 in November 2014 to more than 1,300 in June 2015.

To help increase the level of social services provision for both, host and IDP communities, UCBI supported relocation of one partner by refurbishing and providing them with IT, software, and network equipment. Aiming to raise awareness of the renewed capacity, the Department of Social Protection launched a public information campaign in the rayons of the Luhansk Oblast. UCBI helped design and publish 30,000 copies of digests on assistance and subsidies for IDPs, ATO, and World War II veterans.

### **Program Area 5: Increase access to objective information and reduce vulnerability to manipulative information**

Independent media content and its availability to conflict affected communities continues to be a critical problem in Ukraine. With both sides of the conflict involved in propaganda and counter-propaganda initiatives, the majority of those severely affected by the conflict do not have all the information they need to make informed decisions about their future and the future of their family. UCBI, therefore, doubled its efforts over the last six months to support and promote more independent media content; stronger networks of professional journalists reporting on the conflict; and innovative techniques to disseminate reliable content via web-based media platforms and locally driven print media.

#### **Illustrative activities:**

Residents of the Donbas region and IDPs are increasingly relying on social media and other informal sources, which provide immediate access to critical information in the wake of the conflict. While there are a number of cases of misinformation and propaganda spreading through these informal networks, which exacerbates tensions, they have become the ‘go to’ sources for thousands of conflict-affected residents. As a part of broader efforts to improve access to information about the issues related to the conflict and its impact, UCBI provided IT and equipment to independent media outlets to produce media content highlighting key social and political issues in the liberated territories in Eastern Ukraine and the conflict-affected communities.

UCBI also supported university students’ involvement in journalism to express their perspectives on issues relevant to youth and civic activism in Kharkiv. This is one of the pioneering initiatives to support student reporting and help reduce information manipulations in one of the largest student towns in Ukraine. UCBI helped deliver training sessions and mentoring programs to a group of 17 university students, including IDPs and specialists outside the journalist profession, such as sociologists, linguists, and lawyers. With the IT and media equipment provided by UCBI, the group launched the first issue of a new internet publication in July 2015.

On June 6-8, 2015, UCBI helped organize a forum which brought together more than 240 journalists and media professionals from Donetsk and Luhansk to network, discuss challenges as well as opportunities to provide information to Ukrainians in government controlled and liberated areas of Donbas. The Forum also allowed for an interactive and constructive dialogue between participants. Organizers introduced the internationally-recognized Principles of Journalism and Code of Ethics, and participants pledged to uphold the ethics in their everyday work. To ensure continued dialogue and networking after the Forum, DII created a Facebook group with more than 140 journalists subscribed to date.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

During the first half of 2015, UCBI began to refine its activity and program level M&E. Greater consistency was introduced when creating activity M&E plans, as standard outcomes were introduced and used. Newly employed field program assistants bolstered activity level monitoring, and regular M&E meetings incorporated lessons learned into the program cycle. UCBI also developed its initial plans for “cluster” evaluations during this period, which will be implemented in the latter half of 2015. The program also carried out a rolling assessment in Kharkiv and began planning a number of other M&E activities that will be carried out during the next reporting period.