UKRAINE
Situation Report
Last updated: 22 Jun 2021

HIGHLIGHTS (22 Jun 2021)

- Ukraine Humanitarian Fund continues to be at the forefront of humanitarian response
- Humanitarian aid remains a lifeline for conflict-affected people in eastern Ukraine.
- As of 22 June 2021, there were 2,230,142 people confirmed to have COVID-19 in Government-controlled areas of Ukraine, including 116,883 cases in eastern Ukraine.
- As of 22 June 2021, there were reportedly 46,903 confirmed COVID-19 cases in areas beyond Government control.
- A year in review: movement restrictions across the "contact line" in eastern Ukraine.



Nataliia hugs her three children in the yard of her house located right at the "contact line". Photo: OCHA/Yevhen Maloletka

KEY FIGURES

3.4M
People in need

1.9M
People targeted

120
Partners

96
Projects

FUNDING (2021)

$168M
Required

$27.3M
Received

16%
Progress

FTS: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1015/summary

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EMERGENCY RESPONSE (17 Jun 2021)

Ukraine Humanitarian Fund continues to be at the forefront of humanitarian response

In 2020, the grave humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of people in the region already drained by the on-going conflict have been forced to deal with a health emergency on top of insecurity, reduced livelihood opportunities and insufficient access to health care and other basic services.

In this unprecedented time for residents of eastern Ukraine, the OCHA-managed Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF or Fund)* has enabled a flexible humanitarian response, including to tackle the effects of COVID-19, and quickly disbursed resources to ensure the provision of time-critical assistance to people in need on both sides of the 427-kilometre-long "contact line" in eastern Ukraine – equivalent to the length of the French-German border.

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UHF's allocations overview



A girl is sitting in her yard close to the "contact line". Photo: OCHA/Yevhen Maloletka

Through its four allocations in 2020, the UHF disbursed US$7.5 million to 16 partners operating in Government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-Government-controlled areas (NGCA) of Luhanska and Donetska oblasts, targeting almost 360,000 people in need.

The first two allocations launched in 2020 (April and May) aimed to help the conflict-weary people and health systems of eastern Ukraine cope with COVID-19 and its impact. The UHF allocations helped almost 14,000 people by providing critical supplies, such as hygiene kits with sanitizers and personal protective equipment, to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19. The Fund's implementing partners also trained staff of 79 health facilities on the tracing of contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases. In total, 135 health facilities received medical equipment and were able to improve their capacity to respond to COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to grow its footprint across Ukraine during 2020, the severe movement restrictions introduced early in the pandemic to help curb the spread of the virus hit the residents of NGCA particularly hard. The almost complete closure of the "contact line" on 22 March 2020 cut off hundreds of thousands of people from essential services and severely limited their access to social benefits and entitlements in GCA, including pensions.

Recognizing the specific challenges the NGCA residents were facing, the third and fourth UHF allocations (launched in June and September) primarily aimed to support humanitarian organizations to increase their response activities in areas beyond Government control and help NGCA residents get by during winter months by funding the distribution of solid fuel, coal and other winter assistance items. In addition, one of the two envelopes of the UHF's fourth allocation was channelled to projects implemented together with local authorities in GCA to help build their capacity to gradually take over humanitarian service provision to local residents affected by ongoing armed conflict.

In line with the Emergency Relief Coordinator's four priority areas that are often underfunded in emergencies, all 22 projects funded by the UHF in 2020 systematically supported people with disabilities and contributed to gender equality, continued education in emergencies and the provision of protection services to people in need.

Donors role in effective and timely response

The UHF has only been able to remain at the forefront of the humanitarian response in eastern Ukraine thanks to the continued support of donors. In 2020, 11 donors, including multilateral, bilateral and private donors, contributed almost $9.5 million, which represents around 7 per cent of the total funding received through the Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan in 2020.

These generous contributions allowed the UHF to make timely funding allocations to respond to prioritized humanitarian needs in 2020. These funds also allowed the Fund to swiftly adapt to COVID-19 and to respond with greater flexibility, through simplifications in the current funding arrangements, yet keeping accountability over the use of funds.

We thank the Governments and people of Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Norway, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Sweden and the European Commission, as well as all individual donors for the trust, and count on the continued support of the Fund's activities in 2021.

You can access the 2020 UHF Annual Report here. You can also support the Fund by donating online.

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* The Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) was established in February 2019 to help meet the most critical needs of the conflict-affected population in eastern Ukraine, which would otherwise go unfunded. The UHF is a tool available to donors to pool their contributions into single, unearmarked funds to enable humanitarian partners to deliver timely, coordinated and principled assistance within the framework of the Humanitarian Response Plans. The UHF also allows strengthening coordination and the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) to ensure a principled response, strengthening access to people in need, particularly along the "contact line".

EMERGENCY RESPONSE (22 Jun 2021)

Humanitarian aid remains a lifeline for conflict-affected people in eastern Ukraine



Mykola is standing in his yard in village at the "contact line". Photo: OCHA/A. Hetman

The fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed 3.4 million people in need in eastern Ukraine into greater dependency on humanitarian assistance. In addition, the global health emergency has presented an unprecedented challenge to the humanitarian community in Ukraine, making the delivery of humanitarian aid ever more complicated. Despite these challenges, the UN and its humanitarian partners reached over 1.4 million people in need with the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Ukraine – the highest number since 2016.

Humanitarian response in 2020

In 2020, humanitarian actors delivered assistance in areas of education, food, health, protection, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene. Most people were reached in the area of protection (72 per cent), with educational interventions reaching only 22 per cent of people targeted for assistance due to funding constraints and access restrictions.

Similar to years before, the distribution of assistance and provision of protection services remained geographically uneven, with around 1.2 million people reached in Government-controlled areas (GCA) and almost 270,000 people reached in non-Government-controlled areas (NGCA). While the number of people residing in NGCA who received assistance from the UN and its humanitarian partners during 2020 is significantly lower than GCA, it represents a significant increase of almost 80 per cent over the year before.

Insufficient access to people in need in areas beyond Government control, particularly after the introduction of COVID-19-related movement restrictions across the "contact line" on 22 March 2020, remained one of the major constraints preventing humanitarian actors from reaching more people. Overall, while the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the implementation of humanitarian programmes, the UN and humanitarian partners managed to quickly adapt to the fast-changing operational environment, including by incorporating the response to COVID-19 into the daily life-saving activities.

Donors' support in 2020

The strong support of donors in 2020 allowed humanitarian actors to reach more people in need than the year before despite access challenges and other COVID-19-related constraints. In 2020, donors contributed over US$124 million (61 per cent), which is the highest level of funding since 2015 when $173 million out of the $316 million requirement was received (55 per cent). In addition, the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund established in 2019 attracted $9 million of additional funding, enabling a flexible humanitarian response, including to tackle the effects of COVID-19.

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In 2021, 1.9 million people are targeted with assistance on both sides of the "contact line". The continued strong support of donors is going to be critical for the UN and its humanitarian partners to sustain the effective humanitarian response and reach every man, woman and child in need with life-critical aid they count on.

You can access the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan End-of-Year Report in English and Ukrainian here. The Russian version of the report is going to be available shortly.

TRENDS (22 Jun 2021)

COVID-19 update (Government-controlled areas)

Ministry of Health of Ukraine confirms 2,230,142 cases as of 22 June 2021.

- **First case:** 29 February 2020 .
- **Total cases:** 2,230,142 (as of 22 June 2021)
- **Total deaths:** 52,053.
- **People vaccinated:** 1,732,611 received the first dose as of 21 June 2021, and 362,847 persons received both doses.
- **Luhanska oblast (GCA):** 26,494 confirmed cases (411 active cases and 932 deaths); 34,036 persons received the first dose of the vaccine, and 11,892 both doses.
- **Donetska oblast (GCA):** 90,389 confirmed cases (780 active cases and 2,329 deaths); 64,440 persons received the first dose of the vaccine, and 20,389 both doses.
- **Borders/flights:** On 13 March 2020, Ukraine closed 94 crossing points and suspended pedestrian crossing through the remaining 49 crossing points with neighbouring countries (i.e., Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Slovakia) to prevent the spread of the virus. On 29 May, Ukraine reopened all crossing points with EU countries and Moldova from its side. On 7 July, Ukraine reopened some crossing points with Belarus and the Russian Federation.
- **Ukraine also resumed international and domestic passenger flights from 15 June 2020** and international bus services (with countries allowing entry/exit) from 17 June 2020 after the suspension of international passenger transportation from 17 March 2020.
- **Currently, to cross the border into Ukraine, foreigners and stateless persons, with some exceptions, are required to provide proof of medical insurance** that is valid in Ukraine for the duration of the stay that will provide coverage of costs associated with the treatment of COVID-19, as well as any necessary observation period. Furthermore, **foreign nationals must provide a negative PCR test** taken within 72 hours before the arrival, **an antigen test, or a confirmation of complete vaccination with WHO-listed vaccines**.
- **Containment measures:** In mid-March, the Government of Ukraine imposed quarantine restrictions to minimize the risk of transmission across the country, including in the conflict-affected area of eastern Ukraine. In May, these restrictions began to be eased based on the fulfilment of criteria adopted on both sides of the "contact line". In GCA, an adaptive quarantine was introduced to counter the spread of the virus. Oblasts have been divided into the "red/orange/yellow/green" COVID-19 risk level regions based on two indicators (starting from 28 September): the COVID-19 hospital bed occupancy and COVID-19 incidence rate. The COVID-19 restrictive measures are implemented in cities and raions within oblasts in accordance with their risk levels. **The adaptive quarantine currently in place has been extended until 30 June 2021.**

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- On 16 June, the Government of Ukraine announced that the whole country was now in the "green" level of the COVID-19 risk and eased some of the COVID-19 restrictions. In particular, **as long as the country remains in the "green zone", Ukrainians travelling from abroad or crossing the "contact line" from NGCA will not be required to make a COVID-19 test or self-isolate.**

TRENDS (22 Jun 2021)

COVID-19 update (non-Government-controlled areas)

Local sources reportedly confirm 46,903 COVID-19 cases as of 22 June 2021.

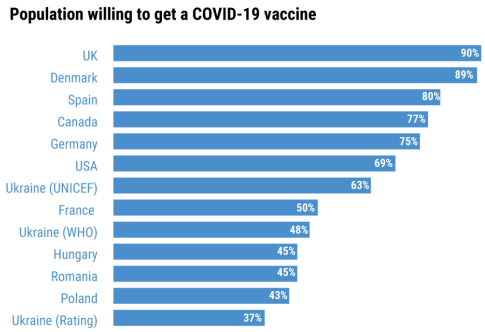
- **Total cases:** 46,903 (3,721 active cases and 3,646 deaths).
- **Luhanska oblast (NGCA):** 5,027 cases (164 active cases and 463 deaths). First case: 31 March 2020.
- **Donetska oblast (NGCA):** 41,876 cases (3,557 active cases and 3,183 deaths). First case: 29 March 2020.
- **Overview of containment measures:** Luhanska and Donetska oblast (NGCA) adopted quarantine measures similar to those in Government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine at the end of March 2020. As part of easing quarantine restrictions, both NGCA oblasts lifted restrictions on travelling to the Russian Federation. **On 18 June 2021, the entities in control in the NGCAs of Donetska and Luhanska oblasts reportedly lifted the ban on travelling from the NGCA of Luhanska oblast to the NGCA of Donetska oblast** for people without permanent residence in Donetska oblast (NGCA). In Donetska oblast (NGCA), to enter NGCA, people also must be included in the pre-approved lists.
- **In early October**, due to a growing number of COVID-19 and pneumonia cases, **Luhanska oblast (NGCA) introduced a two-week observation for people arriving from countries with an unfavourable epidemiological situation** (e.g., China, Italy, Spain, etc.), not including those travelling from the Russian Federation or Donetska oblast (NGCA). Alternatively, **people travelling from GCA may show the negative results of a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test** made not later than 72 hours before the crossing **to cancel the mandatory self-quarantine**.
- To curb the spread of the virus, **in early October, both Luhanska and Donetska oblasts (NGCA) introduced remote learning modalities in higher educational facilities.** Later, mixed learning modalities (regular and online classes) were extended to primary and secondary schools. Donetska oblast (NGCA) also extended e-learning modalities to vocational and professional training schools.
- In the meantime, only **two of the five official crossing points** allow people to cross the "contact line" ("Stanytsia Luhanska" in Luhanska oblast daily and "Novotroitske"/ "Olenivka" in Donetska oblast on Mondays and Fridays). To a large extent, crossings have been limited to those people who have been granted humanitarian exemptions negotiated by the humanitarian community. In addition, people have been allowed to cross based on the pre-approved lists issued in NGCA. For more information on the crossing measures enforced by relevant parties, please refer to the analysis on the crossing of the "contact line" below.

ANALYSIS (18 May 2021)

Ukraine's population readiness to get a COVID-19 vaccine

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The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be gaining an even firmer grip on Ukraine over the past few months. On 23 April 2021, the number of confirmed cases surpassed the 2 million mark, doubling just in 4 months. While the epidemiological situation shows few signs of improvement, Ukraine officially started the COVID-19 vaccination campaign on 24 February 2021. As of 12 May, 882,619 people have received the first shot of the COVID-19 vaccine, and 1,928 people are fully vaccinated.



Per cent of population willing to get a COVID-19 vaccine [11]

However, at the current vaccination pace, *[1]* it will take at least five and a half years to administer one dose to the entire adult population of Ukraine if everyone agrees to take a vaccine. *[2]* Besides, historically, Ukraine's population has been highly vaccine-hesitant, which is reported to be improving in the past few years. At the same time, on 29 April, the record high vaccination level was registered – 73,256 administered doses per day. If the level of vaccination doesn't drop below the above on workdays, the vaccination time horizon of the entire adult population with one dose could decrease threefold.

The surveys' findings presented below attempt to shed light on the population of Ukraine's attitude to COVID-19 vaccines and what could be expected from the vaccination campaign.

According to a UNICEF-facilitated survey conducted during March, *[3]* most respondents consider vaccination an effective way of protection against COVID-19: 63 per cent of all respondents would vaccinate free of charge, with 31 per cent only ready to be vaccinated with certain vaccines. Some 70 per cent of respondents consider the vaccination efficient to prevent serious disease progression and 63 per cent believe it to be safe. The key reasons for compliance with vaccination identified by 83 per cent of respondents are to avoid exposure to COVID-19, followed by preventing severe complications and protecting others (66 per cent).

A different survey, conducted in March by the Ukrainian sociological agency, Rating, *[4]* suggests that only 37 per cent of respondents want to get vaccinated, while 41 per cent would be unlikely get vaccinated. The situation in eastern Ukraine is reported to be slightly worse compared with the rest of Ukraine: 34 per cent are ready to get vaccinated, while almost 50 per cent of respondents would be unlikely to do so. Overall, 71 per cent of respondents consider that mass vaccination will help contain the spread of COVID-19 globally.

WHO's behavioural research conducted in March 2021 *[5]* suggests that the Ukrainian population's attitude to vaccines hasn't significantly changed since August 2020, with 48 per cent of respondents indicating readiness to take a vaccine if it becomes available. The majority of respondents don't plan on receiving a COVID-19 vaccine because of concerns over adverse effects followed by concerns about its country of origin. Meanwhile, the ability to see close family members, lifting of restrictions and receiving the vaccine free-of-charge have been indicated among the most common motivators to get vaccinated.

Regarding the country of origin of vaccines, **the respondents of the Rating survey *[6]* reported the most trust in vaccines produced in the United Kingdom, United States and countries of the European Union** (around 50 per cent). Respondents have the least confidence in vaccines made in China (17 per cent), Russia (19 per cent) and India (30 per cent).

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It is estimated that Ukraine has so far secured around 1.2 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, *[7]* including around 484,200 through the COVAX facility (367,200 AstraZeneca-SKBio and 117,000 Pfizer vaccines). *[8]* There are reports that Ukraine has deals to procure additional 10 million doses of Pfizer vaccine in 2021, and 2.2 to 3.7 million doses of AstraZeneca/Oxford are expected to be provided by the COVAX facility in the first six months of 2021.

Despite the contradictory attitudes to COVID-19 vaccination, **over the past five years, the support for the vaccination of children against various diseases has increased**: 65 per cent support these vaccinations unequivocally and an additional 24 per cent would rather support the vaccination of children against diseases such as polio, measles, tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and diphtheria. *[9]* Yet, Ukraine's population readiness to get a COVID-19 vaccine is still one of the lowest compared with other European countries, including its closest neighbours, as well as the United States and Canada. The first stage of Ukraine's vaccination campaign has also shown worrying results: only 3 per cent of the population above 85 years old has been vaccinated so far. *[10]*

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[1] According to National Security Council of Ukraine, 380,448 received one shot of COVID-19 vaccine in April 2021 and 245,593 in March 2021.

[2] According to the Ukraine Census Database, the total population of Ukraine is: 41.7 million, including 34.2 million residents aged 18 or older.

[3] UNICEF-facilitated survey conducted by the Info Sapiens agency with the USAID financial support, 22 April 2021.

[4] Rating Sociological Agency, Vaccination In Ukraine: Barriers And Possibilities, 18-19 March 2021.

[5] WHO Behavioural insights (BI) on COVID-19 in Ukraine. Wave 11 data collection: March 20-22, 2021

[6] Rating Sociological Agency, Vaccination in Ukraine: Barriers and Possibilities, 18-19 March 2021.

[7] National Security Council of Ukraine, Procurement of COVID-19 Vaccines.

[8] COVAX is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and the World Health Organization.

[9] Rating Sociological Agency, Vaccination in Ukraine: Barriers and Possibilities, 18-19 March 2021.

[10] Ukrinform, Vaccination of People Aged 65 and Above Has Started Earlier than Planned, 29 April 2021.

[11] Reuters, Europe's Vaccine Hesitancy, 1 April 2021.

Aarhus University, Sustained COVID-19 Vaccine Willingness in Denmark Following the Rare Cases of Blood Clots, 9 April 2021.

Statista, Average Willingness to Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19 in Central and Eastern Europe In 2020, by country, December 2020.

ANALYSIS (18 May 2021)

A year in review: movement restrictions across the "contact line" in eastern Ukraine

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On 22 March 2020, all entry/exit crossing points (EECPs) along the "contact line" were almost completely sealed off in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19. This past year, only a fraction of individual crossings that had occurred before the nearly complete closure of the "contact line" was observed: 3 per cent of 1.2 million monthly crossings on average. The year-long restrictions on movement triggered by COVID-19 have left hundreds of thousands of people without access to social entitlements, basic services and have torn them from their families and friends. Residents of non-Government-controlled areas (NGCA), especially people over 60 years old, have been most affected.



People are waiting to cross the "contact line" in eastern Ukraine. Photo: OCHA/ Yevhen Maloletka

Level of crossings across the "contact line"

In March 2021, the level of civilian crossings across the "contact line" in eastern Ukraine remained significantly below pre-COVID-19 levels: around 55,000 individual crossings compared with 600,000 in March 2020 and 1.2 million in March 2019. *[1]*

The lowest level of crossings was observed in April and May 2020, when only several hundred people were able to cross the "contact line" due to stricter movement restrictions in place. Following the partial reopening of two EECPs in June 2020 – "Stanytsia Luhanska" in Luhanska oblast and "Novotroitske" in Donetska oblast – the level of monthly crossings started to grow and reached over 80,000 in August and September 2020.

In October 2020, the EECP "Stanytsia Luhanska" was closed twice: first due to wildfire damage it sustained and then due to the deterioration of the epidemiological situation. Its closure resulted in a drastic drop in the number of crossings in October: some 21,000 compared with almost 86,000 in September. The limitation of allowed frequency of crossings to once per month in Luhanska oblast (NGCA) in September 2020 has led to an overall decrease in monthly crossings between November 2020 and March 2021, averaging 40,000 per month.

Overall, the movement restrictions are less severe in Luhanska oblast (NGCA) when compared with Donetska oblast (NGCA). In Donetska oblast (NGCA), only people included in pre-approved lists could leave and/or come back, while in Luhanska oblast (NGCA) anyone with residency in NGCA of Luhanska oblast could enter/exit once per month. People can also reach the other side if their reason for crossing falls under humanitarian exemptions negotiated by the UN and its humanitarian partners shortly after the partial closure of the "contact line". The list includes the death of a close relative, the need for urgent medical intervention and the necessity to respect the principle of family unity, among others.

The varying severity of restrictions in the two NGCAs has resulted in a shift of the individual crossings' distribution between the two oblasts. The pedestrian-only EECP "Stanytsia Luhanska" in Luhanska oblast has been responsible for 95 per cent of all crossings of the "contact line" following its partial closure, while Donetska oblast had been responsible for over 70 per cent of all crossings before the start of the pandemic.

Reasons for and frequency of crossing the "contact line"

Before the introduction of COVID-19-related restrictions, hundreds of thousands of residents of eastern Ukraine who had been "split" by the "contact line" had crossed to visit relatives, access health-care services, resolve issues with documentation, pensions and social payments, withdraw cash and check on their property.

The almost complete closure of the "contact line" in March last year has disproportionately affected the people residing in NGCA – 90 per cent of all people crossing before the introduction of movement restrictions – who are more reliant on accessing services and social entitlements provided in Government-controlled areas (GCA). Prior to COVID-19, there was

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large-scale and regular crossing of the "contact line" by about 20 per cent of the NGCA population.

During the year before the closure, the majority of people crossing from NGCA crossed every two months (around 70 per cent) or monthly (some 15 per cent) to resolve issues related to pensions and social payments (around 70 per cent), withdraw cash (some 35 per cent) followed by visiting relatives and obtaining documentation. *[2]*

During the year following the introduction of severe movement restrictions, the frequency of crossings from NGCA dropped along with the level of individual crossings: of the small number of people crossing, less than 40 per cent of people crossed every two months and less than 10 per cent monthly. *[3]* NGCA residents also crossed more often to visit relatives (some 60 per cent) and less frequently to withdraw cash (below 40 per cent) and resolve issues related to pensions and social payments (less than 30 per cent). *[4]*

The shift in the reasons for crossing is largely connected with the overall decrease in the number of crossings and the limited ability of NGCA pensioners to cross to collect and recover their social entitlements: prior to COVID-19, over 65 per cent of those crossing were elderly NGCA residents.

During the year of closure, GCA residents travelled to NGCA less frequently too, with the plurality of people (more than 25 per cent) indicating that they travelled once in two years, followed by 10 per cent indicating four times a year and 10 per cent every other month. By contrast, during the year before the closure, over 30 per cent travelled every month followed by 20 per cent quarterly and 15 per cent bimonthly.

Prior to the "contact line" closure, the majority of GCA residents (70 per cent) crossed to visit relatives, which remained similar during the year of closure. The second most common reason for GCA residents to travel before the closure was to check on their property (34 per cent). This reason has been less common following the start of the pandemic: only 16 per cent of people who have been able to cross.

Self-quarantine and testing for COVID-19

Since the partial reopening of the two EECPs in June 2020, entering GCA from NGCA has been subject to a 14-day-self-quarantine, which is monitored through a smartphone app called "Dii Vdoma" [Act at Home]. *[5]* Almost 60 per cent of all people crossing into GCA reported difficulties with installing and using the app. This requirement has been particularly challenging for the elderly, many of whom don't own a smartphone or lack the knowledge on how to use one.

People crossing into GCA who don't have a smartphone or are unable to download the "Dii Vdoma" are required to quarantine in a designated facility for 14 days or until they receive a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test result. However, until January 2021, the PCR tests for COVID-19 were only available at cost, and therefore were too expensive for the majority of vulnerable people. Moreover, the observation option hasn't always been available to people due to lack of beds in designated medical facilities.

Currently, the self-quarantine may be terminated earlier subject to a negative result of a PCR test and, from 5 January 2021, a COVID-19 antigen test. In January, the Government of Ukraine made free-of-charge express antigen body tests available at the EECP "Novotroitske" and since March at the EECP "Stanytsia Luhanska". There have been reports that at "Stanytsia Luhanska", the testing capacity is insufficient to meet demand: tests are available only for around 10 per cent of the average of 1,000 people who are crossing per day.

There have also been reports about the lack of information on free testing and testing facility's opening hours. Moreover, there are reports of people trying to take advantage of the current crossing situation by joining the COVID-19 testing queue to sell their place in line to those who actually need it. Others offer their help with installing the "Diia" app to vulnerable people in exchange for money.

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Upon entering Luhanska oblast (NGCA) from GCA, a two-week self-quarantine at a place of residence remains mandatory. In Donetska oblast (NGCA), people entering from GCA must undergo a two-week observation in a designated facility unless they pay for an express test which, if negative, allows them to self-isolate at their place of residence.

Impact of movement restrictions on civilians

The year-long COVID-19-related restrictions have left hundreds of thousands of people without access to social benefits, basic services, and separated them from their families and friends, with NGCA residents affected most. It is estimated that at least 360,000 NGCA pensioners who regularly crossed to GCA to collect their pensions have been unable to do so over this past year. Since March 2020, over UAH11 billion (US$396 million) has accumulated in pension accounts. *[6]* Due to movement restrictions, NGCA pensioners have been forced to find alternative ways to survive, including relying more on NGCA social payments, depleting their savings, borrowing money or accessing their pensions through costly and legally challenging routes.

Even though two service centres, providing a range of administrative, banking, legal and other services, have been opened in GCA near two EECPs, very few people benefit from them as the possibility to cross the "contact line" remains very limited. COVID-19 restrictions have increased the isolation of NGCA residents from the rest of Ukraine and have had a negative impact on people's mental health. Unable to visit their families and close ones for over a year, without any definite prospects of improvement, people report feeling trapped.

Essentially, for people whose reasons to cross don't fall under the "humanitarian exemptions" or who can't confirm the permanent place of residence in GCA/NGCA, respectively, the only option is to transit through the Russian Federation. This travel, however, is much more costly, exhausting and legally challenging option, and is not viable for most elderly and vulnerable people. Furthermore, even though the Russian Federation (which keeps its borders closed for most foreigners) still permits residents of NGCA of Luhanska and Donetska oblasts to enter and transit to NGCA/GCA, there have been reports of the introduction of new limitations, making this route less accessible. For instance, people with Ukrainian biometric passports are allegedly no longer allowed to enter the Russian Federation, while it is still allowed for Ukrainians with older Ukrainian passports containing a stamp confirming their permanent residence in one of NGCAs.

Movement restrictions in 2021

Severe restrictions of movement are expected to further exacerbate people's vulnerabilities, hitting NGCA residents even harder, and deepen the rift between the once united community. It is anticipated that the "contact line" will remain substantially closed at least until summer 2021. Chances are that the "contact line" won't reopen until the end of the year.

The recent increase in the level of hostilities also increases fear that the conflict might reignite, causing additional hardship for the already conflict-exhausted people. In these circumstances, people's access to humanitarian assistance and the humanitarian community's ability to reach people in need wherever they reside remains critical until a peaceful solution to the armed conflict is found.

Timeline of COVID-19-related movement restrictions

21 March 2020: The Government of Ukraine imposes temporary limitations on crossing the "contact line", allowing only people with a permanent place of residence in GCA to enter. The entities in control of NGCA of Luhanska and Donetska oblasts, in their turn, suspend all civilian movement across the "contact line".

March - April 2020: Both sides introduce "humanitarian exemptions" for crossing the "contact line", which include (i) the death or severe disease of a close relative, (ii) severe or chronic illness that requires urgent medical intervention, (iii) the need to respect the principle of family unity, etc. *[7]* People who were able to cross the "contact line" on the above grounds

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were required to self-quarantine for 14 days. Even though the NGCAs mirrored the approach, only several hundred people were able to cross the "contact line" in April and May 2020.

10 June 2020: Two crossing points reopen from the GCA side: "Stanytsia Luhanska" in Luhanska oblast and "Novotroitske" in Donetska oblast (both operate daily).

12 June 2020: The EECP "Stanytsia Luhanska" reopens from the NGCA side in Luhanska oblast (operates daily).

22-25 June 2020: The EECP "Novotroitske"/"Olenivka" reopens from the NGCA side in Donetska oblast (open only on Mondays and Fridays).

25 September 2020: Luhanska oblast (NGCA) limits the individual crossings to once per month for people with permanent residency in NGCA of Luhanska oblast.

15 October - 10 November 2020: The EECP "Stanytsia Luhanska" is temporarily closed from the GCA side due to a deterioration of the epidemiological situation.

10 November 2020: Two new EECPs in Luhanska oblast – "Shchastia" and "Zolote" – open from the GCA side, while all earlier operational EECPs (five) also reopen from the GCA side. Due to ongoing concerns about the epidemiological situation on the NGCA side and deadlock in political negotiations, only two EECPs operate on a limited basis from both sides: "Stanytsia Luhanska" in Luhanska oblast and "Novotroitske" in Donetska oblast.

5 January 2021: The Government includes an antigen test to the list of tests that allow early termination of mandatory self-quarantine for those arriving from NGCA. Free of charge COVID-19 tests are made available at EECPs from the GCA side for Ukrainian citizens.

1 March 2021: The first-ever UN-organized convoy passes through the new EECP in Luhanska oblast, "Shchastia", which remains closed for civilian crossing to date.

22 March 2021: The Government decides to exclude people who travel from NGCA to get vaccinated in GCA from mandatory two-week self-quarantine.

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[1] According to the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine

[2] UNHCR Ukraine and Right to Protection, eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring (2020) and eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring (2019)

[3] UNHCR Ukraine and Right to Protection, eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring (October-December 2020) and eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring (January-March 2021)

[4] UNHCR Ukraine and Right to Protection, eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring (2021)

[5] *Ibid.*

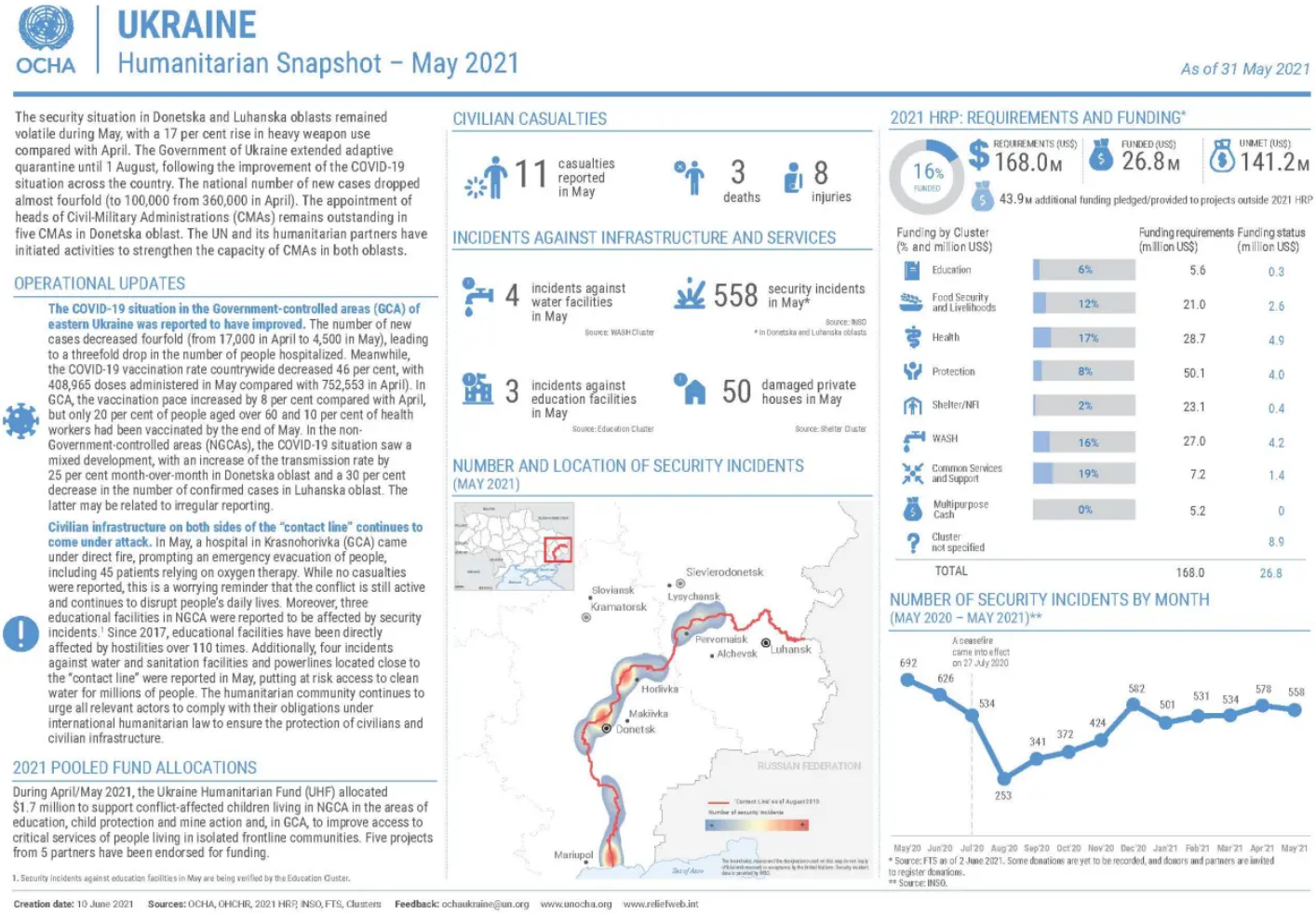
[6] Ukraine Ombudsperson, facebook.com/denisovaombudsman/posts/5364601880279184

[7] The list of exemptions negotiated by the humanitarian community includes the necessity to respect the principle of family unity, death, or severe disease of a close relative as well as severe or chronic illness, which requires urgent medical intervention.

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VISUAL (15 Jun 2021)

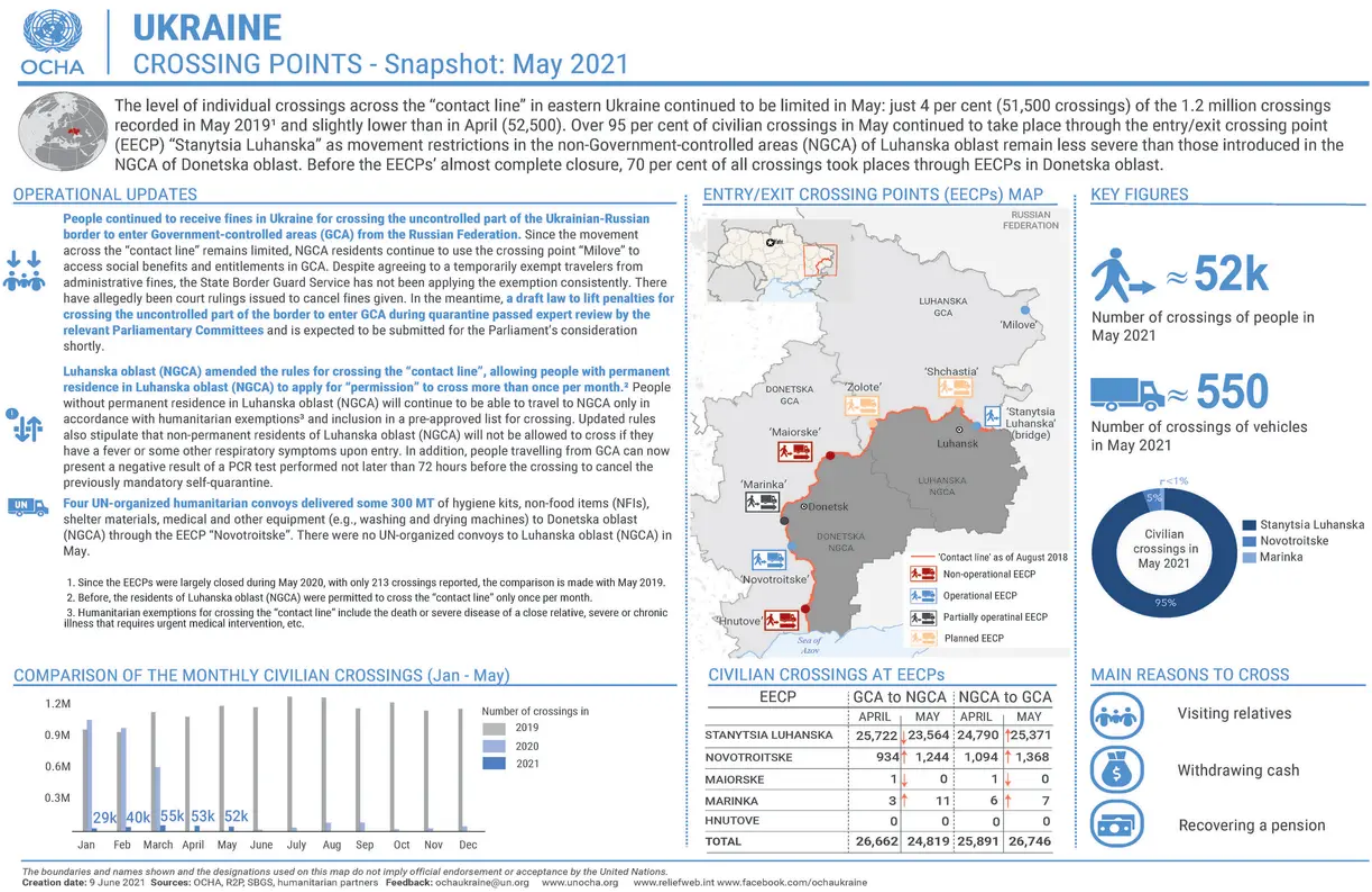
Humanitarian Snapshot (May 2021)



VISUAL (22 Jun 2021)

Crossing Points Snapshot (May 2021)

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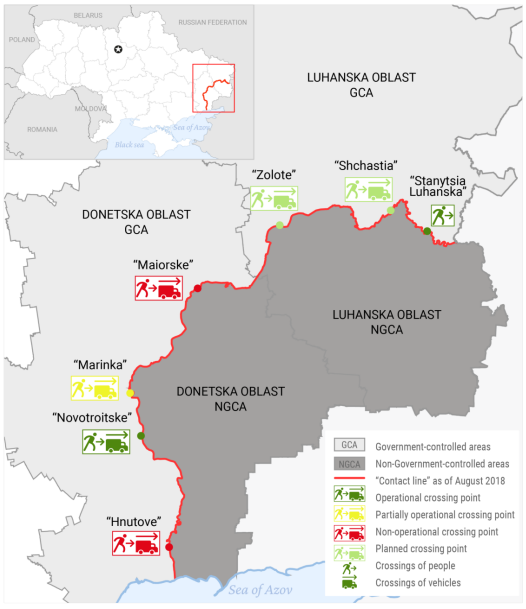


BACKGROUND (25 Jan 2021)

Humanitarian Context

Now in its seventh year, the conflict in eastern Ukraine continues to significantly impact the lives of millions of people living in the region, 3.4 million of whom require humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2021. Although the July 2020 ceasefire has brought marked reductions of hostilities and civilian casualties as well as the longest breathing space since the beginning of the conflict, the end is not yet in sight. As the humanitarian crisis aggravated by COVID-19 persists, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. Fear of shelling, violent clashes, and the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war are the daily reality for millions of people living on both sides of the more than 420 kilometre-long "contact line" – equivalent to the length of the French-German border.

The shock of COVID-19 has created additional pressure on the struggling population. The pandemic and its ramifications have sent the weakened healthcare system, the floundering provision of social services and the declining regional economy to a breaking



A map of eastern Ukraine divided by the 427-kilometre-long "contact line".

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point. During the first months of the pandemic, all crossing points along the "contact line" were closed in an attempt to contain the virus, which seriously restricted people's freedom of movement. This made it almost impossible for the population in need, particularly the elderly living in areas beyond Government control (NGCA), to obtain their main sources of income such as pensions and social benefits, or to maintain family ties. Such exclusion has not only increased people's vulnerabilities but also added to their mental and psychological stress. Although two of the five crossing points partially reopened in June 2020, crossing procedures and restrictions remain complicated. Following the introduction of movement restrictions due to COVID-19 in late March 2020, the number of monthly crossings has been less than 10 per cent of the 1.2 million monthly crossings in 2019. Meanwhile, the volume of humanitarian aid delivered on UN-organised convoys to NGCA between March and December 2020 dropped by 16 per cent compared to the same period during 2019, with COVID-19 relief items constituting a large portion of the delivered assistance. Overall, the pandemic has made hundreds of thousands of conflict-weary people more vulnerable and more dependent on humanitarian aid.

Severe restrictions of movement have and will further increase the affected population's vulnerabilities hitting NGCA residents particularly hard. It is to be expected that the "contact line" will remain substantially closed until summer 2021. At the same time, the opening of the two new crossing points in Luhanska oblast has been indefinitely delayed due to disagreements on the mode of operation. On a positive note, gradual progress on new organizations gaining access to operate in NGCA appears likely, especially to support the COVID-19 response.

With COVID-19 continuing to have a firm grip on the entire country, economic recovery in eastern Ukraine seems unlikely in 2021. Communities are expected to remain dependent on support to help them regain their self-sufficiency and recover from the effects of the prolonged crisis as well as the pandemic. Despite an increase in the Government's engagement in humanitarian response in Government-controlled areas (GCA), national emergency response and preparedness capacities are likely to be overwhelmed by increasing and more severe needs. The restrictions on movement across the "contact line" will contribute to increased vulnerability, while the situation in NGCA is projected to be acute due to the limited capacity of hospitals and laboratories.

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MEDIA (25 Jan 2021)



View this Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj921IPRpno

With ongoing hostilities and the COVID-19 pandemic, 3.4 million people are projected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in eastern Ukraine in 2021.

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