

UKRAINE COVID-19 Response



For four nights persons were stranded in the “grey zone” of EECP Novotroitske staying overnight in tents. UNHCR and its NGO partners provided them with food, water, legal assistance and counselling. Photo by Proliska.



UNHCR jointly with its NGO partner DDC distributed hygiene items and personal protective equipment for persons who entered NGCA and had to undergo observation. Photo by UNHCR.



After a three months break because of the closure of the EECP, the two electric cars operated by NGO partner Proliska are again transporting persons with specific needs at EECP Stanytsia Luhanska. Photo by Proliska,



UNHCR Response to recent situation at the Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) in east Ukraine

Intro: On 21 June, the de facto authorities of NGCA Donetsk issued Decree #197 on the reopening of the ‘contact line’ for certain NGCA residents including those with humanitarian needs to enter and exit NGCA Donetsk. It was announced that the re-opening of the NGCA EECP Olenivka (EECP Novotroitske on the GCA side) would happen on 22 June for NGCA residents to cross into GCA, while 25 June for crossings into NGCA. The decree informed that people entering NGCA would be quarantined in a Donetsk hospital for 14 days. The order also allowed UN, ICRC and OSCE representatives to enter and exit NGCA Donetsk in order to “fulfil their mandate”.

On 22 June, UNHCR monitored the first cars that crossed from NGCA to GCA (which included students that would take part in the national university entry exams). The main concern observed by UNHCR for those who moved from NGCA into GCA was the inability of some of the people (not all) to install the “Diy vdoma” (*Act at home*) mobile app needed to enter GCA. According to the official decree issued by the Ukrainian authorities (Resolution #480 of 12 June), those who would not have the “Diy vdoma” app installed in their mobile phones would not be able to enter GCA. Therefore, the inability to install the “Diy vdoma” mobile app, regardless of the reasons (lack of smartphone, incompatible system, lack of knowledge of how to do so, etc...) left some people stranded in between the GCA and NGCA zero checkpoints (i.e. in the so-called “grey zone” or “no man’s land”).

On 26 June, as a result of UNHCR advocacy (see more below) a decision was taken by the Donetsk Regional Oblast administration to move those stranded to observation points near the EECP Novotroitske on the GCA side where they were tested for COVID-19. At the moment, 17 of them have already left the observation point after testing negative for COVID-19. At the same time, 55 persons who attempted to enter NGCA were also stranded because they had not been included in a list compiled by the Donetsk NGCA de facto authorities. Many were elderly and unaware of the requirement to apply and be put on the list. Thanks to UNHCR advocacy, they were exceptionally allowed to enter NGCA Donetsk and moved to a hospital to observe a 14-day quarantine. On 28 June, citing concerns with the situation of COVID-19 in GCA, the de facto authorities in NGCA Donetsk closed the EECP on their side. In the meantime, at EECP Stanytsia Luhanska, the movement of people who applied for crossing the ‘contact line’ based on “humanitarian exceptions” continued in both directions to this day. In this location 6,602 people have crossed the EECP at Stanytsia Luhanska in both directions between 22 and 29 June.



▪ **Advocacy at National Level (GCA):** On 17 June, UNHCR met with the Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Oshchadbank to discuss the functioning and availability of bank services at the EECPs and the situation of overcrowding which could contribute to the spread of COVID-19. During the meeting, Oshchadbank was shown pictures of the overcrowding at the EECPs, after which they promised to organize a field visit in order to find a solution to this problem. On 18 June, at a meeting with

the Coordination Council on IDP issues at the Office of the Ukraine Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR shared the [recommendations developed by the UN Country Team](#) related to the safe re-opening of the EECPs, with a checklist of risk mitigation measures for resumption of civilian movement across the 'contact line'.

- **Advocacy at Regional Level (GCA):** UNHCR advocated with regional authorities, such as the Donetsk Oblast Administration and the Joint Forces Operations (JFO) to allow persons stranded between GCA and NGCA because of difficulties with the "Diy vdoma" mobile app, to proceed to observation points in GCA. As a result, on 26 June, those stranded were moved to their observation point near EECP Novotroitske together with UNHCR and its NGO partner *the Right to Protection* (R2P) which also helped them to fill out necessary administrative forms.

- **Advocacy with de factos (NGCA):** On 23 June on the NGCA side, UNHCR advocated with the de facto authorities to allow the transportation of persons with specific needs (medical cases and physically challenged) from the zero-checkpoint on the GCA side to the NGCA checkpoint. This request was subsequently granted on 26 June when 33 persons were moved and sheltered in a tent near the NGCA side of the EECP Olenivka. They were also provided with food and water by UNHCR's NGO partner *the Donbas Development Center* (DDC). On the next day, 27 June, an additional 22 people arrived from GCA and were unable to enter NGCA for the same reason and, therefore, stranded. For this reason, on 27 June, UNHCR advocated for both groups of stranded persons on the NGCA side of the EECP (a total of 55 persons) to be allowed to be taken to Donetsk for quarantine in a Donetsk hospital.

- **Continued Presence at the EECPs on both sides of the 'contact line':** UNHCR remained present on both sides of the 'contact line' throughout the attempted reopening. UNHCR has been visiting EECP Oleksandrivka (EECP Mariinka on the GCA side) on a regular basis since 15 June. UNHCR noted that although EECP Oleksandrivka never opened, queues were still observed when rumors spread that an opening might happen. From 22 June onwards, UNHCR has been continuously present at NGCA EECP Olenivka (EECP Novotroitske in GCA). On the GCA side of the EECP, UNHCR and its NGO partners Proliska and the *Right to Protection* (R2P) have been continuously present. Proliska also deployed a psychologist at EECP Novotroitske on 27 June, to provide relief to persons who demonstrated psychological distress.


- **Monitoring of preparedness efforts:** UNHCR has monitored the preparedness efforts by the Ukrainian Government and the de facto authorities for the re-opening of the EECPs. On the NGCA side, UNHCR visited the Donetsk hospital designated as quarantine location to ensure that it met acceptable standards. During the visit, UNHCR noticed that rooms have been renovated and that mothers with small children were accommodated in rooms with smaller number of persons. On the GCA side, UNHCR noted on 18 June that additional tents were needed for those who waited and advocated for additional tents with the State Emergency Service (SES), which they promptly provided.


- **Provision of Food and Water:** On the NGCA side, UNHCR provided water and food for people placed in quarantine in the Donetsk hospital (for a total of 160 persons) together with NGO partner DDC. Food and water were also provided to new arrivals at the EECP on 27 June as they waited and completed forms prior to being transported to the hospital for their quarantine. On the GCA side, UNHCR provided food to those who were unable to leave the EECP. UNHCR also liaised with other actors – such as ICRC – to inform them of the need of food and water at the EECP. On 26 June, UNHCR's NGO partner Proliska delivered food to those hosted in the observation point in GCA.


- **Provision of non-food items (NFI):** In NGCA Donetsk, UNHCR provided 33 sets of bed linens and clothes (including flip flops, shirts and underwear) to those who needed these at the designated quarantine hospital in Donetsk. UNHCR provided personal protection equipment (PPEs) and sanitizers to the same hospital to cover the needs of 300 persons and 100 medical staff.

- **Information sharing:** On 22 June, UNHCR liaised with the de facto authorities of NGCA Donetsk and received permission to disseminate posters prepared by UNHCR and R2P with information regarding the installation and use of the "Diy Vdoma" application for self-isolation. This activity is being done through NGOs, such as MIRA and DDC.

- **Liaising with other actors:** UNHCR worked closely with other humanitarian and human rights actors as well as the de facto authorities in NGCA Donetsk to ensure that the UNHCR response actions were complementary by, inter alia, assessing the needs of the hospital designated as a quarantine location (food, water, sanitizers, NFIs, etc.), communicating with other actors (such as ICRC, Save the Children, Polish Humanitarian Aid and DDC) and ensuring that all necessary facilities were in place and functional at the designated hospital for quarantine (water, showers, toilets, kitchen, etc.)

 **Remote follow up of civilians stranded in the “grey zone”:** Between 22 and 27 June, UNHCR maintained telephone communication (through its hotline) with people stranded in the “grey zone” between the Novotroitske (GCA) and Olenivka (NGCA) EECPs. UNHCR also maintained contact with the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine to keep them informed of the situation of those stranded and to advocate on their behalf.

 **Legal Support by R2P:** R2P continued to provide legal assistance to those stranded in the “grey zone” when appropriate. R2P also supported individuals that were stranded in the preparation of a Rule 39 (interim measures) request before the European Court of Human Rights to raise the issue of the obligation to install “Diy vdoma” mobile app as a precondition for entering GCA, which resulted in having civilians waiting for an undetermined amount of time in a location where their physical integrity would be at risk due to shelling and the presence of mines.

 **Electro-cars in EECP Stanytsia Luhanska:** Starting from 25 June, the two electro-cars supported by UNHCR’s NGO partner Proliska resumed transportation of vulnerable individuals. As of 30 June, 2,223 persons with specific needs benefitted from electro-car transport.

Issues noted by UNHCR:

- On 22 June, at EECP Novotroitske some people did not wish to enter GCA once they learned about the mandatory instalment of the “Diy vdoma” mobile app. Some returned to NGCA from the “grey zone” as they were unwilling to self-isolate.
- UNHCR noted that all civilians who move from NGCA to GCA were fingerprinted on the NGCA side.
- All civilians moving from NGCA were signing a declaration of non-return to NGCA until the end of the quarantine regime.
- Waiting areas on the NGCA side are not equipped with shades which exposes civilians to severe heat.
- No physical distancing or wearing of masks was observed at the NGCA EECP. Lack of sanitizers at EECP facilities was also noticed
- Crowding of the EECP without the possibility of physical distancing, people not always wearing masks and other risks of contagion when helping each other to install the Dvi Vdoma app were prevalent.
- Many of those crossing, in particular elderly persons, encountered numerous challenges installing the “Diy vdoma” app for self-isolation. Wi-fi access was not available at the EECP.
- Access to drinking water, especially in the premises of the EECPs (on both the GCA and NGCA sides) as well as in the “grey zone” where many needed to wait for long hours.
- Due to the high temperatures experienced at the moment, many persons, in particular the elderly, face various health issues including overheating and fainting.
- Lack of medical assistance on duty at the EECP Stanytsia Luhanska (only available on call) while other EECPs have medical NGOs (Première Urgence) or local medical ambulances on stand-by.

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