

# UKRAINE COVID-19 Protection Monitoring Report #3

Of 119 isolated and conflict-affected localities along the contact line

## Key Message

If it were to spread in the areas along the contact line, COVID-19 would have a **devastating impact**. Several factors contribute to the situation of **heightened risk** in the localities situated within five kilometers of the contact line in government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine:

- The population in these localities along the contact line includes a **large proportion of older persons** (at least 41 per cent) who suffer from the insecurity, lack of services, stress and economic downturn associated with the armed conflict;
- The infrastructure for prevention of the COVID-19 (such as plentiful clean water for hygiene) and response (medical facilities) has been **weakened by the conflict**.
- In order to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 in Ukraine, on March 12, the Government introduced quarantine measures, which included the closure of public transportation. This has **important implications** for these mainly rural communities.

## Protection monitoring

UNHCR's NGO partner Proliska has a **network of community workers** who live in localities along the 'contact line' and collect information on preparedness levels and the impact of quarantine measures in these localities. This report is based on monitoring conducted in the period of 11-23 April 2020.



40

Community workers



119

Localities



242k

Population

## Summary of Findings

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**36 localities** had no public transport before the quarantine. Now 71 localities have no public transport functioning because of quarantine.

### ACCESS TO CASH

**107 localities** lack ATMs and cash-less payments in local groceries are rarely an option. Most residents receive their pensions through bank cards.

### ACCESS TO FOOD

**55 localities** did not have grocery shops before the quarantine and depended on transport or mobile grocery stores.

### ACCESS TO WASH

**14 localities** in Donetsk reported not being able to ensure their personal hygiene because they do not have clean water or no water at all.

### ACCESS TO HEALTH

**49 localities** report that FAPs are not available. In 21 localities, residents depend on public transportation to reach the nearest FAP.

### TELECOMMUNICATION

Villagers **depend on phone communication** in these locations. However, access to credits (scratch cards) have become a challenge.

## Recommendations

- Provide **mobile banking services** in localities cut off from both ATMs and public transport (list is available).
- Provide **humanitarian food assistance** and prioritize localities without grocery shops and public transportation.
- Local authorities and humanitarian actors must support smooth and uninterrupted functioning of Ukrposhta services.
- Home-based care programmes should include **delivering necessary medication to people** who can no longer reach pharmacies.
- Initial programmes on **supporting the medical staff with transportation** have been launched; however, more support is likely to be required in this regard.
- **Access to stable mobile network connection** became an issue of life-saving importance for the residents of the isolated contact line localities. To ensure this access, UNHCR continues its advocacy with mobile network providers.

## Results

### Main Findings

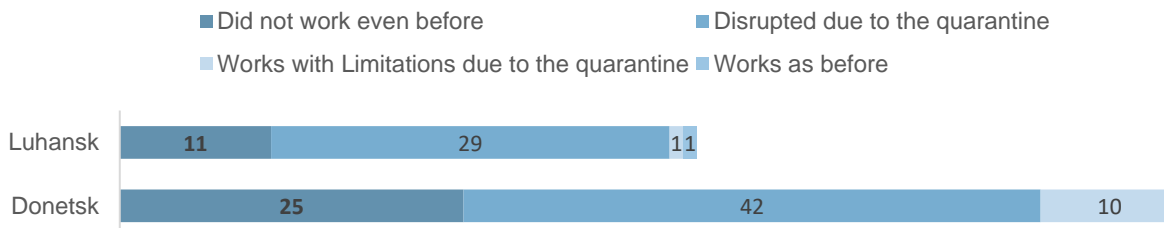
Over the past six years, armed conflict led to a collapse in the provision of basic services in many localities along the contact line. Residents developed various coping mechanisms, **mainly relying on public transportation** to reach nearby villages and towns where basic services were still provided. The risk of COVID-19 and the quarantine measures have placed these coping measures under additional strain. As a result, the risks to vulnerable, conflict-affected persons have compounded.



### Access to Public Transportation

In **107 localities**, residents still face problems with access to public transport, which creates overwhelming obstacles for **129,415 persons** to access basic services. No major changes in the access to public transportation were identified over the reporting period. People generally try to cooperate and rent private vehicles to get to shops, pharmacies, ATMs, etc., however, the partners witnessed several cases when the vehicles were stopped at internal block posts and people of certain age (60+) were not allowed to move out of their communities (cases were identified in Luhanska oblast).

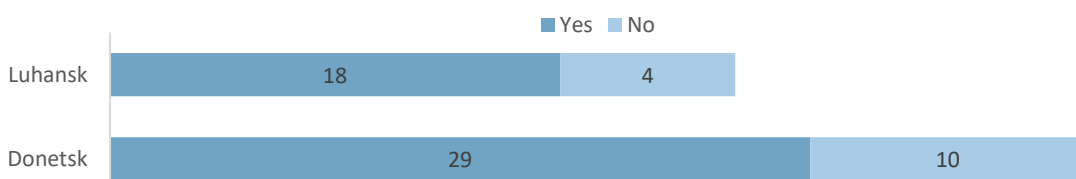
Availability of public transport (# of monitored localities per oblast)



### Access to Cash

The situation with access of conflict-affected population to cash and cash-less payments remain without changes. Most residents of the monitored localities still experience challenges with access to their pension and social benefits. As already reported, the terminals for cash-less payments are scarce. Previous Protection Monitoring revealed that **107 out of 119 localities lack ATMs**. Cash-less payments are rarely an option as very few grocery stores in these localities allow for cash-less payments. Since residents no longer have access to public transportation, they face difficulties in getting access to the cash they need to buy food, medicine and other goods.

Availability of payment terminals in working groceries



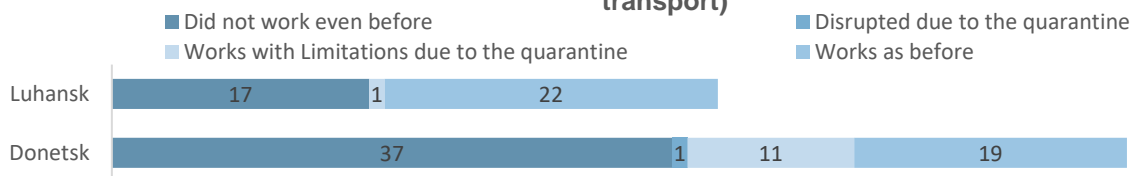
During the reporting period, **UNHCR shared the dataset of isolated localities** where conflict-affected communities face difficulties with accessing banking services and ATMs for cash withdrawal **with Oshchadbank in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts** (largest state bank facilitating pension payments). UNHCR urged to ensure that the local population can continue accessing these services in their locations, in particular after the movement was restricted. As a result of this intervention, Oshchadbank reassured UNHCR that it will monitor the situation in the locations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts where its ATMs are installed, and regularly supply them with cash. Oshchadbank mobile vehicles continue functioning, however, with interruptions due to technical problems with the vehicle (in Donetsk oblast). Ukraine's National Post Ukrposhta plays a very important role for the residents of the contact line localities to have regular access to their pensions and social payments, medicine and other goods. Ukrposhta staff continue delivering post parcels even in isolated localities. During the reporting period, the **residents of 18 localities with no or disrupted transportation, received cash assistance from humanitarian actors**. The assistance was mainly targeting the most vulnerable persons and was provided to enable them to buy food.



### Access to Food

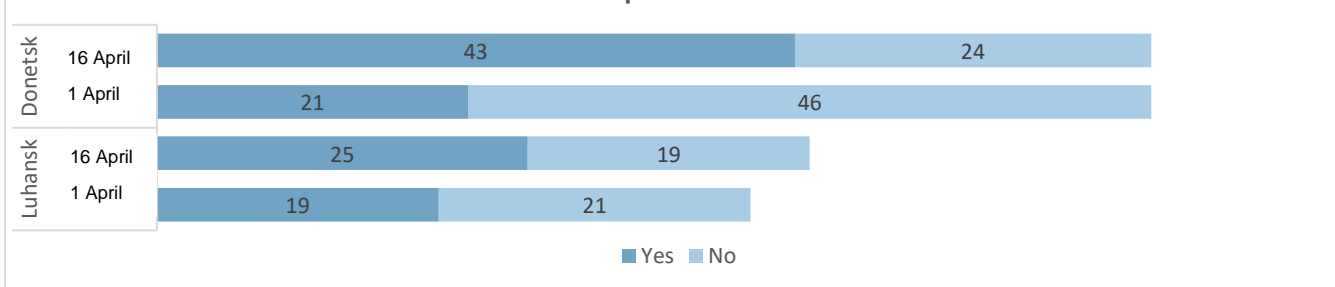
No major changes in the situation with access to grocery shops were observed. As previously reported, access to **grocery shops is not available for residents of 55 monitored localities** with no or disrupted transport services. They depend on mobile grocery shops and on food distributions by humanitarian and government actors. UNHCR is negotiating with Donetsk and Luhanska State Regional Administrations possible ways to **facilitate uninterrupted work of the available grocery shops** as well as timely supply of the goods they offer.

#### Availability of Grocery Shops (# of monitored localities with no or disrupted transport)



According to the monitoring data, as of 15 April, **residents of 68 localities with no or disrupted transport services received food parcels** from humanitarian actors in March-April. Comparing to the previous report, **28 new localities were covered with food assistance**.

#### Coverage with food parcels in the monitored localities with no or disrupted transport services



Starting from 1 April, the local authorities in Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts have been leading the food distribution to vulnerable persons, residing in the contact line localities. In the framework of the joint project between the Department of Social Protection (DoSP) and the ATB retail network, **food parcels distribution was conducted in 40 monitored localities**. At same time, the residents of 43 localities did not receive any food assistance or cash, and 22 among them have no transportation or grocery shops. This means that **713 persons who have restricted access to basic food products were not covered by food assistance programs**.



### Access to Water and Sanitation

No changes in the access to water and sanitation in the 119 monitored localities were observed over the reporting period. The **residents of 14 localities in Donetsk oblast are still not able to ensure their personal hygiene** due to unavailability of clean water or water at all.

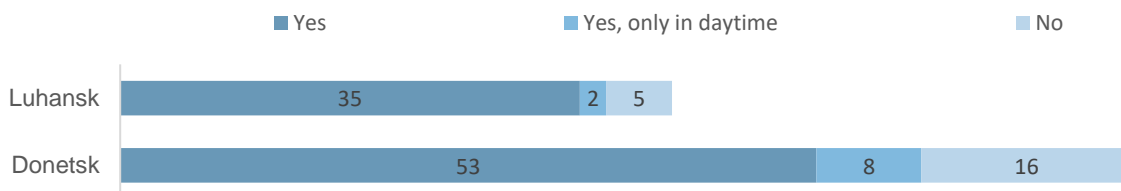
As of 15 April, humanitarian actors distributed hygiene items to the residents of 36 monitored localities. **UNHCR delivered 230 litres of sanitizing products to 16 localities** on the government-controlled side of the contact line in Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts. These hygiene products were distributed to the first medical aid points, pharmacies, post offices and local community centers. During the reporting period, UNHCR and its NGO partner NGO Proliska supported 15 IDP and local communities' initiatives for production of masks and protective gowns in the localities along the contact line. More than **13,800 of protective items were produced and distributed** among the local healthcare facility employees and persons with specific needs.

### Access to healthcare services

Overall, there have been no changes in the access to healthcare service in the 119 monitored localities. The coverage by primary medical staff and the ambulance remains at the same level. In terms of access to pharmacies, as previously reported, **74 localities' residents have no opportunities to buy necessary medicines**. However, with the availability of Ukrposhta services, people can order medicine online through several online pharmacies (only basic medicines that do not require medical prescription) and the postal service will deliver the order. Nevertheless, UNHCR is negotiating with Donetska and Luhanska State Regional Administrations possible ways to **facilitate uninterrupted work of the available pharmacies** as well as timely supply of the goods they offer.

The medical mobile teams that conduct the testing for CoVID-19 have been established in raions and towns along the contact line. According to the monitoring data, the medical mobile teams will not be able to cover all the 119 localities. Like ambulances, the mobile teams will be impeded by risks linked to the security situation and road conditions.

**Coverage by ambulance (#of monitored localities per oblast)**



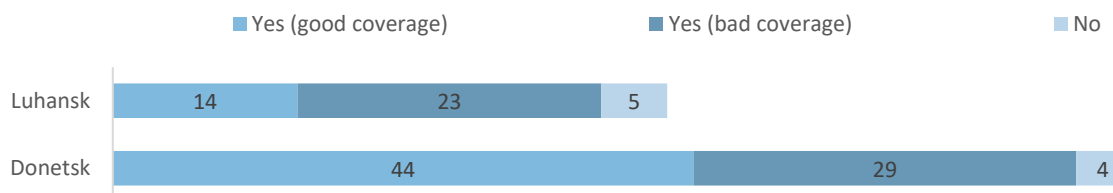
To facilitate the outreach of family doctors and primary medical staff to the isolated localities, UNHCR's NGO partner Proliska is in the process of **purchasing and distributing of 75 electric bicycles**. Medical and social workers covering remote and isolated localities will be provided with this means of transportation to ensure they keep extending services to their population.

### Access to mobile network

During the quarantine, most people access services over mobile phones or internet. This is difficult for many persons living along the contact line, since some localities do not have a stable mobile network, or any coverage at all. Mobile phone coverage is critical for access to healthcare during the COVID-19 outbreak, since people are instructed to call their family doctors in case of illness.

According to the report, there are **9 localities along the contact line without mobile service coverage**.

**Mobile network (#of monitored localities per oblast)**



Thanks to Proliska, this box containing disinfectant gel, medical masks and a temperature screening device was set up to check those who move between Staromarivka and Hranitne village. UNHCR negotiated renewal of movement between the two locations. Photos: Proliska.



## Risk Factors

There are no changes in situation related to the COVID-19 identified cases in monitored localities. As of 15 April, there is reportedly **one confirmed COVID-19 case in one of the monitored localities**. Some persons who returned from abroad to monitored localities finished their period of observation. The field monitoring reveals that the security situation in the contact line localities has deteriorated since the quarantine measures have been put in place. According to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR<sup>1</sup>), 19 conflict-related civilian casualties were recorded during the period 1-31 March 2020. The number of civilian casualties in March exceeded total for January and February 2020; this is highest monthly figure since September 2019.

## Conclusions

- Residents of the isolated contact line localities are facing challenges **accessing basic social and medical services, as well as to water, sanitation and food**.
- In the coming weeks, residents may face a **cash shortage** if mobile banking services are not made available.
- Without public transportation and cash, **residents of many localities will be unable to purchase food, medicine and hygiene items**.
- The **healthcare system** has been crippled by the six-year-long armed conflict and will face extreme pressures if faced with COVID-19 cases.
- **Access to a stable mobile network may have life-saving significance** in the situation of quarantine; however, in some localities, it is not available at all.
- Initial programs on **supporting the medical staff with transportation** have been launched; however, more support is likely to be required in this regard.

Please note that UNHCR is sharing this monitoring data on a regular basis with Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast and raions Administrations. In addition, 200 printed A2 maps of the monitored localities were shared with the local authorities.

UNHCR is grateful for critical financial support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programs with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds. These include:



## Contacts

Hugo Reichenberger, External Relations Officer, UNHCR Ukraine, [REICHENB@unhcr.org](mailto:REICHENB@unhcr.org)

## Links

UNHCR Ukraine: [www.unhcr.org/ua](http://www.unhcr.org/ua) - Twitter: [www.twitter.com/UNHCRUkraine](https://www.twitter.com/UNHCRUkraine)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UNHCRKyiv](https://www.facebook.com/UNHCRKyiv) - Reports: <https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/resources>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org.ua/en/information-centre/news/4871-conflict-related-civilian-casualties-in-ukraine-march-2020>