

UKRAINE COVID-19 Protection Monitoring Report #4

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 settlements 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**.
- The Government introduced quarantine measures, which included the closure of public transportation. This has **important implications** for these mainly rural communities.

Presence on the ground

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.



40

Community workers



119

Localities



242k

Population

Summary of Findings

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

In **10 localities** in Donetsk Oblast, social transportation provided by humanitarian actor ADRA resumed its functioning on 17 April.

ACCESS TO CASH

One more locality was covered with cash assistance by humanitarian actors, thus in April the residents of **19 localities** with no or disrupted transportation received financial aid.

ACCESS TO FOOD

One grocery shop in Donetsk Oblast, which stopped working in the beginning of the quarantine, **resumed its work** in mid-April.

ACCESS TO WASH

14 settlements 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

Residents of **74 localities** have no opportunity to buy medicine they need, since there is no pharmacy in their villages nor there is one in walking distance.

TELECOMUNICATION

Vodafone Ukraine provided around **2,500 residents of 73 isolated localities** without access to public transportation with **free cellular credits**.

Recommendations

- Local authorities should **ensure access to basic social and medical services**, as well as to water, sanitation and food for the residents of the isolated contact line localities by bringing these services to people.
- Provide mobile banking services in those localities that have been cut off from both ATMs and public transport (list is available upon request).
- Provide **humanitarian food assistance** and prioritize localities without grocery shops and public transportation.
- Local authorities and humanitarian actors to 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.
- Both state and humanitarian assistance programmes should **ensure covering undocumented persons, stateless persons/persons at risk of statelessness**.
- State aid programmes cover only persons who fall under specific vulnerability criteria (e.g., elderly who live alone, persons with disabilities), all other vulnerable persons should be covered by humanitarian actors. This requires coordination between the Departments of Social Protection and humanitarian community.

This protection monitoring report has been possible thanks to UNHCR's NGO Partner Proliska

Results

Main Findings

Over the past six years, armed conflict led to a collapse in the provision of basic services in many settlements 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.

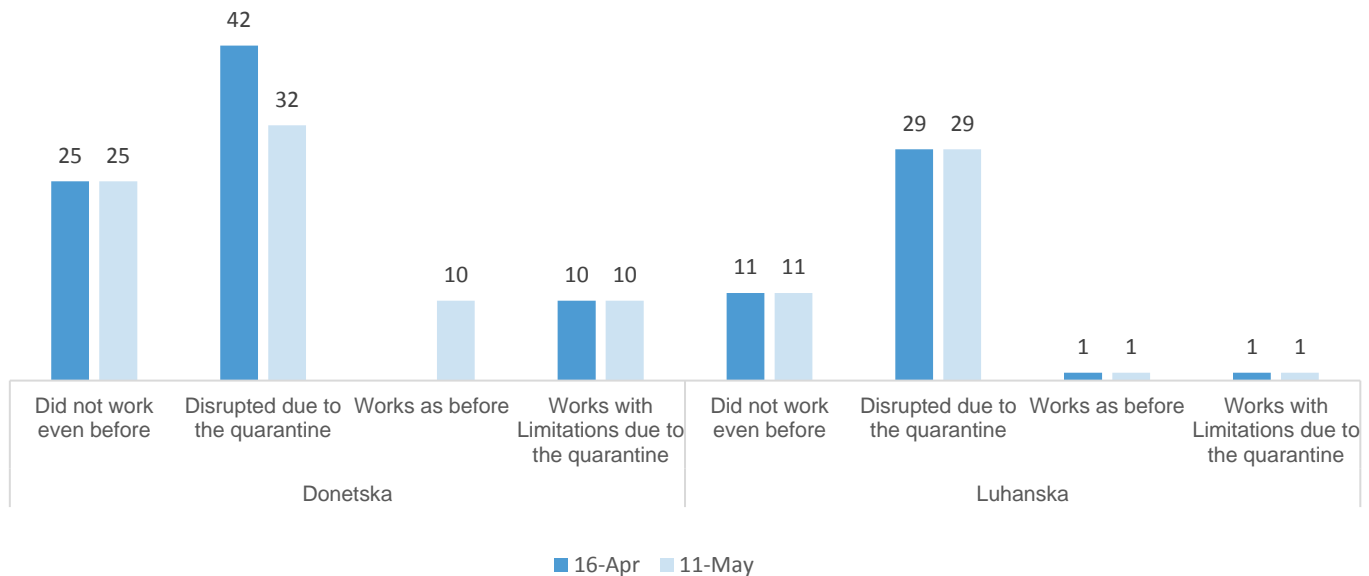


Access to Public Transportation

Comparing to the previous reports, when in **107 localities** residents did not have access to public transport, the situation **improved slightly**. As of May 11, in ten localities in Donetsk Oblast, social transportation provided by humanitarian actor Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) resumed its functioning on April 17. It should be noted, however, that the social transportation limits the number of persons allowed on a bus, and all the passengers must wear masks and gloves (are provided on board). In addition, the frequency of buses functioning is very limited.

Thus, currently, there remain **97 localities** in Donetsk and Luhanska Oblasts, where the public transportation is still not available, which creates overwhelming obstacles for **114,687 persons** in accessing basic services and goods.

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



Access to Cash

The situation with access of conflict-affected population to cash and cash-less payments **remains without major changes**. As already reported the terminals for cash-less payments are scarce. The coverage with ATMs remains at the same level, as previously reported.

Oschadbank mobile vehicles continue functioning, however, with interruptions due to technical problems with the vehicle (in Donetsk Oblast).

Ukraine's National Post Ukrposhta continues delivering post parcels and pensions during the quarantine even in isolated localities. In addition, there is a possibility to order medicines and cash to be delivered through a post officer. However, the orders have to be done online, which is difficult for older persons and impossible for the residents of ten localities, where mobile network is not available.

Over the reporting period, one more locality was covered with cash assistance by humanitarian actors; thus, in April the residents of 19 localities with no or disrupted transportation received financial aid. The assistance targeted the most vulnerable persons and was provided to enable them to buy food. However, in five of these localities, grocery shops are not available, so using cash is likely to be a problem for the residents.

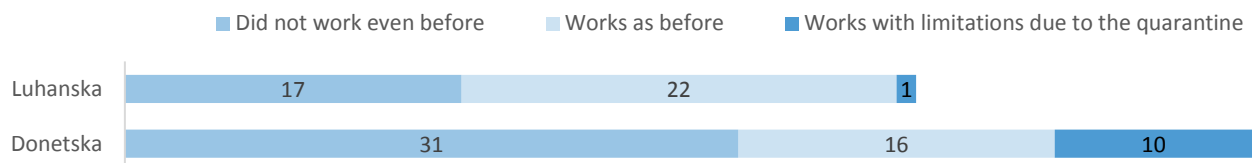


Access to Food

No major changes in the situation with access to grocery shops were observed during this round of data collection. **One grocery shop** in Donetsk Oblast (Troitske, Yasynuvata raion), which stopped working in the beginning of the quarantine, **resumed its work** in mid-April. This is a very important improvement for **152 residents** of the localities accessing this shop, since the public transport stopped functioning and this shop is the only option to buy basic goods in the village.

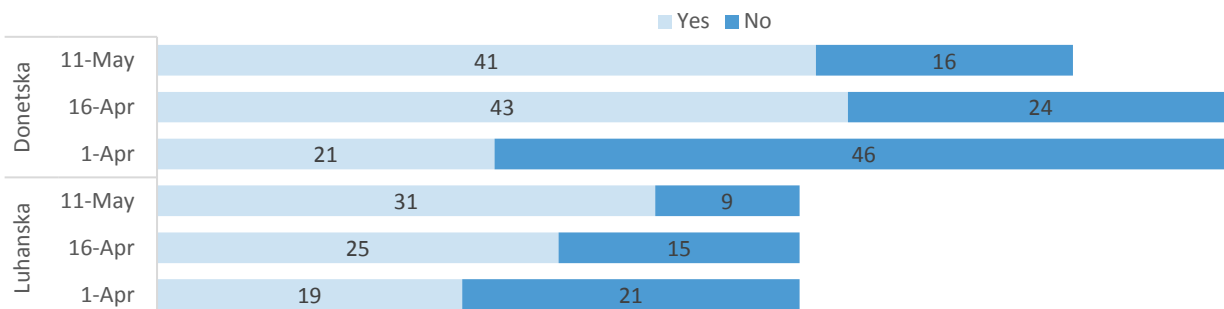
Currently, there remain **48 localities out of 97** with no or disrupted transportation, where grocery shops are not available. The **residents of 33 localities** depend on mobile grocery shops, in other localities, people have to rely on food distributions by humanitarian and government actors.

Availability of Grocery Shops in the monitored localities with no or disrupted transportation



Overall, from the beginning of the monitoring **food assistance** was provided in **91 localities**. The providers of the assistance were both Departments of Social Protection (DoSPs) and humanitarian actors. Out of the covered localities, **72 have no access to public transportation**.

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



Joint efforts of the Government and humanitarian community to provide food assistance to the vulnerable population of the localities along the contact line should be noted. The chart above reflects the positive trends. However, the food assistance, provided a month ago or more has most likely already been depleted.

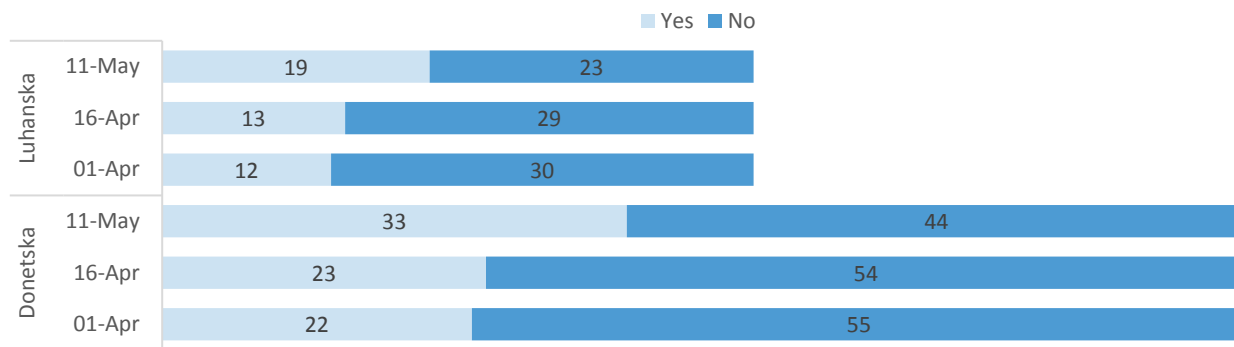
It is important to note that the **residents of 16 localities** with disrupted transportation and unavailable grocery shops did not receive any food assistance from the beginning of the quarantine. This means that **474 persons** who have restricted access to basic food products **were not covered by food assistance programs**.

In six localities in both Oblasts, social workers hired by Proliska through the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) have been providing hot meals since March to the most vulnerable persons who are unable to cook for themselves.



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.

Coverage with Hygienic Items (# of monitored localities per oblast)


Within the reporting period, UNHCR and its partner **NGO Proliska supported at least 15 IDP and local conflict-affect communities'** initiatives on production of face masks and protective gowns in the localities along the contact line. As of May 11, more than **31,400 protective items were produced and distributed** among the local healthcare facility employees and persons with specific needs.

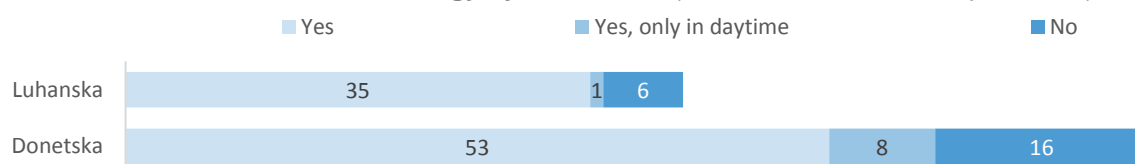
Additionally, eight community support initiatives envisaging distribution of face masks were financially supported by UNHCR.

In the framework of three other community support initiatives, sanitizing products were delivered and distributed in Luhanska Oblast through UNHCR; one similar community initiative was supported in Donetska Oblast.

UNHCR distributed **1,255 individual hygiene kits** for DoSP social workers in **Donetska Oblast** and **480** kits for DoSP social workers in **Luhanska Oblast**.


Access to healthcare services

Overall, there have been **no changes** in the access to healthcare service situation in the **119 monitored localities**. The coverage by primary medical staff and ambulances remains at the same level.

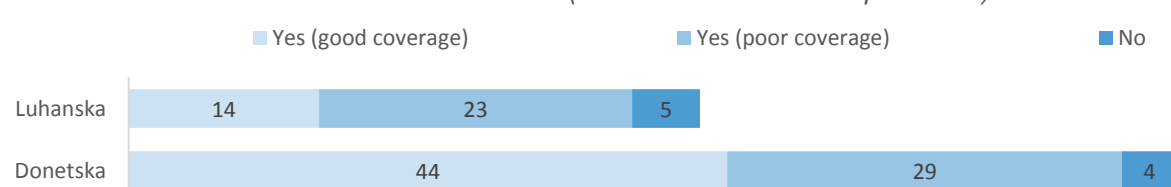
Coverage by ambulance (# of monitored localities per oblast)


Currently, the **ambulance services do not reach 22 localities**. Ambulance services reach nine localities during the daytime hours only.

Residents of **74 localities** have no opportunity to buy medicine they need, since there is no pharmacy in their villages nor there is one in walking distance.


Access to mobile network

No significant changes in the situation have been observed during the reporting period. In **one locality** in Luhanska Oblast, a **mobile network reportedly broke**. 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.

Mobile network (# of monitored localities per oblast)


Since most of the residents of the isolated localities are Vodafone users, UNHCR raised the issue that many people cannot reach shops to purchase cellular credits at a time when mobile phone connectivity has heightened importance. Vodafone Ukraine has demonstrated solidarity with elderly persons residing in isolated villages in eastern Ukraine by providing them with free cellular credits. Vodafone assisted 2,500 residents of 73 isolated localities where there is no access to public transportation. Thanks to these phone credits, people with specific needs are now able to call their family doctors, order life-saving medicine and/or food. The beneficiaries were selected, and the phone numbers collected by UNHCR and its NGO partner Proliska.

In addition, to make sure that the social workers and family doctors as well have access to mobile credits to respond to the increased number of queries, UNHCR and its partner Proliska are implementing a project on provision of scratch cards for them. The project will cover social workers and family doctors assisting vulnerable persons in isolated localities in both Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

Moreover, in order to enhance access to means of communication in the isolated localities with no or poor mobile network connectivity, UNHCR is implementing a project on installation of amplifiers. The project will strengthen telephone connectivity, so that villagers will be able to use online and telephone services. UNHCR's partner Proliska will facilitate sessions for older people to learn how to use their devices for these purposes.

Risk Factors

The previously reported case of Covid-19 in an isolated village in Luhansk Oblast has recovered. **Two new cases** have been identified in the monitored localities, both in Donetsk Oblast in bigger localities. Low capacity to conduct Covid-19 testing in both Oblasts puts the residents of the monitored localities under additional risks.

The security situation in the conflict zone of eastern Ukraine remained instable during the reporting period with continuing fighting along the contact line in both Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Cease fire violations continue to be reported by the OSCE, therefore, the risks to civilian lives, properties and infrastructure remained. Most of the incidents resulting in civilian casualties and damages to houses occurred during daytime; the risk for civilians is higher during day hours due to the people's daily life activities that increase their exposure to the armed conflict threats.

Conclusions

- 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 settlements 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.
- UNHCR is negotiating with Donetsk and Luhansk State Regional Administrations possible ways to **facilitate uninterrupted work of the available grocery shops and pharmacies**, as well as timely supply of the goods they offer.
- Initial programs on **supporting the medical staff with transportation** have been launched; however, more support is likely to be required in this regard.
- Monitoring data has been regularly shared with Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and raion Administrations.

This protection monitoring report has been possible thanks to UNHCR's **NGO Partner Proliska**

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

Links

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

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