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PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS

monthly bulletin

- COVID-19: how the pandemic affected life in the zone of armed conflict, including in uncontrolled territories. Analysis and useful links
- News of CIVILM+ and member organizations
- Political Processes and the Situation in the Conflict Zone
- Legislative Initiatives and Analysts on the Conflict
- Assistance for civilian victims of conflict
- Interviews and Journalism

COVID-19 in Donbas

As of 31 March, [645](#) cases of coronavirus were recorded in the government-controlled territory in the conflict zone in Ukraine. 'Ministry of healthcare' of the self-proclaimed 'LPR' [reported](#) only one case of infection. In 'DPR', according to the 'ministry of healthcare', [there were no cases of infection](#); 7,984 people were under observation, 118 out of them were in hospital, while 7,866 were isolated at home.

According to preliminary estimation, around 3,4 million people in Ukraine's east are in need of humanitarian assistance. UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) presented an [Emergency Response Plan for the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). The document lists three reasons that trigger fast spread the virus in the regions already torn by the armed conflict: high percentage of elderly people (36% of the population in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, while the average share in the country is 23%); large population movements across the contact line and the decay of the health care system as a cumulative affect of the armed conflict.

Read the [East SOS report](#) to learn more about the preparedness to the pandemic of the medical institutions of Luhansk region. The monitors defined the following key problems: critical lack of medical personnel, lack of knowledge of treatment procedure, lack of means of individual protection, reanimation and diagnostic equipment.

Igor Mitchnik, the Head of the [DRA](#) Resource Center 'Drukarnia' in Slaviansk, [wrote a piece](#) having spent several March days in the hospital in Kostyantynivka: "If Ukraine reaches a similar number of infections to Germany, Ukraine – and particularly its war-torn east – will face an additional humanitarian disaster."

Ongoing hostilities make the situation worse. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine [called on all the parties](#) involved in military action in eastern Ukraine to stop fighting because of the spread of the COVID-19.

The Head of the MFA of Germany Mr. Heiko Maas [has also urged to prevent a humanitarian disaster](#). “This crisis has to urge us all to look for the fast resolution to the conflict”. Now is the time when we need progress in the implementation of the decisions of the Normandy Summit in Paris and Minsk agreements”.

People in places of deprivation of liberty are one of the most vulnerable during the pandemic. More than 100 civil society organizations from different countries have come up with [a joint statement](#) “On the situation with COVID-19 in the closed prisons in Russia-occupied Crimea and in the parts of Donbas under Russian control”.

The [Eastern-Ukrainian Center of Civic Initiatives prepared a material](#) about the perspectives of treatment of people who are in captivity in non-government-controlled territory in case they are infected with COVID-19.

The entry-exit crossing points (EECP) are closed. Only people who are registered on the side they are going to are allowed to cross; the crossing is also possible in cases of emergencies. In addition, on 27 March [access was restricted](#) to the zone of Joint Forces Operation.

On 21 March, the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk people’s republic’ [closed](#) its entry-exit crossing points. “I was not allowed to return home”: [residents](#) of eastern Ukraine [speak](#) about the closure of the EECPs [has influenced](#) their lives.

On 27 March, the Russian Federation closed its border for everyone [with the exception of several groups of citizens](#), including for the ‘citizens of the Russian Federation who permanently reside in the territories of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, if they are citizens of the Russian Federation’.

On 17 March, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [adopted a law](#) that, among other points, abolished, for the time of quarantine, the obligatory verification for the internally displaced persons to receive their pension. The charitable foundation ‘Right to protection’ [has analysed](#) the legislative changes in Ukraine made to the COVID-19.

Online media ‘[Hromadske](#)’, as well as the Ukrainian bureau of ‘[Radio Liberty](#)’ report about the ongoing situation in non-government-controlled areas because of the pandemic.

A military expert Mr Oleg Zhdanov shares his views on [the possible influence](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic on the war in Donbas.

At political level, Ukraine is undertaking efforts to prevent the lifting of sanctions against Russia as an excuse deriving from the pandemic. This is an extract from an interview of Ukraine’s Minister for foreign affairs Mr. Dmytro Kuleba [published by ‘Evropeiska Pravda’ \(‘European Truth’\) on 30 March](#): “*They [Russia - ed.] act from afar and suggest, for humanitarian reasons, abandoning those sanctions that prevent the fight against coronavirus. So far, they are not directly talking about the lifting of sanctions enforced in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. But we understand perfectly the logic of their actions. We are working to prevent this scenario. I cannot even assume that*

someone in Europe does not understand their strategy.” [Unofficial translation of the interview’s extract into English is at the CivilM+ website.](#)

The Director of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of Ukraine Mr. Sergii Korsunskyi [shared his opinion](#) about “the war to abolish sanctions”.

The self-proclaimed authorities in non-government-controlled territory use measures on countering the pandemic as a reason not to allow access of SMM OSCE patrols. [Ukrainian diplomats](#) have already issues protesting statements calling on their international partners [“to keep exerting pressure on the Russian Federation”](#).

On 25 March, [the European Union published a statement](#) calling on Russia to unblock the access for the OSCE to the occupied areas of Donbas.

German politician Mr Manuel Sarrazin, the Spokesperson for Eastern European Policy of German’s Green party, Bundestag MP has stated: “Exceptional global situation with coronavirus should not result in the ability of Russia to fulfil, unilaterally, its strategic goals in Ukraine. Germany should remain capable in undertaking actions”. Unofficial translation of the statement [is available](#) at the CivilM+ website.

News of CivilM+ and member organizations

- On 2-4 March, the participants to CivilM+ met in Kyiv. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the results of the implemented projects, to design an action plan for the future, to root common values and vision, and to meet new members of the Platform.
- “Human safety and ceasefire are a priority”. Member-organizations of the Platform [published a statement](#) about the Twelve-step plan presented in the context of the Munich Security Conference on 14 February 2020.
- Civil society organizations from Ukraine, Russia and the EU suggest establishing an independent group of civic consultations for the Minsk talks on Donbas. The [key points of the CivilM+ statement](#): Russia should not be an observer, but a side in the negotiations, as a full-fledged party to the conflict, and any legitimisation of the self-proclaimed “DPR” and “LPR” is unacceptable.
- ‘The Union of Women of Don’ (Novocherkassk, Russia) [speaks](#) about a discussion “A Dialogue through the sufferings of the war in Donbass” that took place within the series of meeting ‘Local wars of the 20th and the 21st centuries. Peace in the entire world – illusion or reality?’ (*the text is in Russian*)
- In Moscow, the Sakharov Center hosted [a meeting](#) of volunteers-participants of non-governmental programs of assistance to the victims of the conflict in Ukraine. The meeting was initiated by the volunteers who in summer last year participated in the International camp in Sloviansk organized by DRA.
- The Ukrainian organization Truth Hounds has prepared [a report](#) ‘A shelling that everyone is silent about: ‘Maiorsk’ station’”, on 7 September 2014. The report provides an answer to a question who fired a shell at Maiorsk; the explosion that followed injured five civilians (the text is in Ukrainian).

- In August 2019 – February 2020, Truth Hounds conducted ten field missions in eastern Ukraine. The findings of these missions were summarized in a report '[War Crimes in Eastern Ukraine: findings of 2019-2020](#)' (the text in Ukrainian)
- DRA together with East-SOS has published a report '[Disengagement of armed forces in the conflict zone in Donbas](#)', based on the information obtained during the international monitoring mission

Political Processes and the Situation in the Conflict Zone

Minsk process

- March 11, 2020 - [meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group \(TCG\)](#) took place in Minsk. It resulted in the [signed agreements](#) on the possibility of creating an advisory body that fixes the subjectivity of uncontrolled territories, and [Russia](#) receives the status of guarantor-observer along with Germany, France and the OSCE. In Ukraine, a series of related [protests](#) took place. Radio Liberty [reports](#) on the events (*text in Russian and Ukrainian*)
- March 18, 2020 - public initiatives, citizens and local authorities published an open [appeal](#) to the leadership of Ukraine with a request to withdraw Ukraine's consent to create a Coordinating Council, where, in accordance with the decision of the TCG on March 11, representatives of the so-called "LDNR" should enter. A similar [public appeal](#) was also published (*text in Ukrainian*)
- March 24 - Civic organizations of Ukraine, Russia and the EU as participants of the CivilM+ proposed to create an independent civic counseling group to accompany the Minsk process on the Donbass. See more in the [CivilM + News section](#).
- March 25, 2020 - the [meeting of the](#) TCG was held in the form of a video conference. The office of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky [said](#) that no documents were signed following its results (*text in Ukrainian*) *The*
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine gave a large interview to [European Truth](#). CivilM + has prepared an unofficial translation of the Donbass parts in [Russian](#) and [English](#) (*text in Ukrainian, Russian and English*)
- Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov [talked](#) in the interview about negotiations with militants, coronavirus help for uncontrolled territories and the future of anti-Russian sanctions and plans to return Crimea (*text in Russian, Ukrainian*)

Other events

- March 6, 2020 - In the Netherlands, an open trial on the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 began, but on March 23, the Hague District Court [suspended the](#) hearing of the case until June 8 in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic (*text in Russian*). The recording [of the process broadcast is](#) available on the "Present" website (*text and video in Russian*).
- March 13, 2020 - the European Union [extended](#) for 6 months sanctions against Russian companies and citizens whose actions were aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine (*text in English*)
- March 31, 2020 - Andriy Yermak, head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, [announced](#) new exchanges of [prisoners](#) (*text in Ukrainian*)

- UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission reported [increase](#) of deaths or injuries of civilians in Eastern Ukraine in the period March 1-22: 1 person died and 15 were injured. This is the largest number of civilian casualties per month since September 2019 (*text in Russian*)

Legislative initiatives and analysis of the conflict

- The ECOSOC [released](#) the Final Conclusions and Recommendations to Ukraine based on the consideration of the State Report of the VII cycle. Report is mainly about the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They stated the need for more effective measures to ensure the rights of people affected by armed conflict (*text in English*)
- Charitable Foundation East-SOS published a review of human rights violations in the temporarily occupied parts of Lugansk and Donetsk regions for February 2020 (*text on [Ukrainian](#) and [Russian](#)*)
- Charitable Foundation "Right to protection" published a monitoring [report](#) "Crossing the contact line through the checkpoints" of February 2020 (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Charitable Foundation East-SOS published a February [report](#) the work of public hotline for reporting human rights violations committed by security forces in the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions controlled Ukrainian forces (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Charitable Foundation East-SOS published an [analysis](#) of events of the first half of March 2020 taken place in the so-called "L/DPR". Analysis was made in the framework of the joint project of DRA and Vostok-SOS (*text in English*)
- Charitable Foundation Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union has prepared a [publication](#) on the situation with compensation for housing destroyed in the aftermath of hostilities (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union had published an [analysis](#) of the [draft](#) Law of Ukraine No. 3057 "On the National Agency of Ukraine for Overcoming the Consequences of Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation" (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union presented an analytical [report](#) "Rehabilitation of victims of the conflict. What can the community of Sumy and Sumy region offer?" (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union held [a press-conference](#) on violation of property rights in situations of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the presentation of the research "Violations of property rights in situations of armed conflict in the east of Ukraine and ways of protection" (*text in Ukrainian*)
- An expert [discussion](#) on the the development of legislation on responsibility for cooperation with the occupation authorities of the so-called "L/DPR" took place in Kyiv (*text in Ukrainian*)
- "Manipulation and Sabotage of Russia Against the Investigation of MH17" - article with the such a title was [published](#) in the daily newspaper De Volkskrant (Netherlands) (*text in Ukrainian*)
- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Ukraine published a report on the human rights situation in Ukraine for November 2019 - February 2020 of (*text [Russian](#), [English](#) and [Ukrainian](#)*)

Assistance for civilian victims of conflict

- March 5, 2020 - the first Conference of public organizations “Discrimination of vulnerable groups in Ukraine: state policy and public opinion” was held in Kyiv. In the course of the work [recommendations](#) were developed on protection of the rights of Ukrainian prisoners in temporarily occupied territories and civilians injured as a result of a military conflict in eastern Ukraine (*text in Ukrainian*)
- March 13, 2020 - a round table was held in Kyiv “Securing housing for IDPs, ATO and Joint Forces Operation veterans: Government Programs and Initiatives”. A transcript of speeches was [published](#) on the website of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (*text in Ukrainian*)
- March 26, 2020 - a public street [action](#) took place under the office of the President of Ukraine. It was organized by relatives of prisoners held in the Donbass (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Lyudmila Denisova, Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, [stated](#) that since the beginning of 2020 about 1000 applications have been received from Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in the so-called “L/DPR” with complaints of ill-treatment and torture (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Memorial Human Rights Center Vladimir Domnin as a political prisoner. He is a Russian citizen accused of fighting in Donbas on the Ukrainian side (*text in [Russian](#) and [English](#)*)

Interviews and journalism

- [Article](#) by Oleg Martynenko (Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union) on amnesty as a part of transitional justice (*Russian text*)
- [Interview](#) by “Ukrainian Radio” with Elena Semerkina, expert of Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, on the need to develop legislation on non-criminal responsibility for “cooperation” with the so-called “L/DPR” authorities (*audio in Ukrainian*)
- How does the [memory](#) about the passed civilians of Donbass gets created - in the publication of the magazine "Spilne" (*text in Ukrainian*)
- [Interview](#) with Andrei Baranovichi, co-founder of "Ukrainian cyber-alliance" about the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia in the cyberspace (*text in Russian*)
- Head of humanitarian mission "Proliska" Evgeny Kaplin - about the life of people in the ["gray zone"](#) of Donbass (*text in Russian*)
- What can be expected by [students](#) who graduate "universities" at temporarily uncontrolled parts of Luhansk region - in the material of Radio Liberty (*text in Russian*)
- [History](#) of Sergei Roebuck, released from captivity in “DPR” (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Radio Liberty issued a [documentary](#) movie “MH17” - on the defendants in the case of the Boeing shot down over the Donbass (*video in Russian*)
- BBC had published documentary series [podcast](#) “The Air Force on the war in Donbass and the work of the journalists who cover it” (*text in Russian*)

- February 27, at the Theater.doc (Moscow), the play "The Process. The Case of Konstantin Kotov" was read about a Russian political prisoner, civil activist who took part in actions against the war in Donbass ([text](#) and [video](#) in Russian)
- Journalist Stanislav Aseev, who has been held captive in the so-called DPR for more than three years, [shares](#) memories [about his term](#) in Donetsk, which will become part of his future book (*text in Russian*)
- Donbass Realii [tell](#) a story of Valery Matyushenko, one of the prisoners held in captivity the so-called "DPR" (*text in Russian*)
- March 29, 2020 - As part of the Antiviral Docfest project, Novaya Gazeta showed [documentary](#) movie "Donetsk Airport". At the Artdocfest festival earlier in 2019, the movie won the best short documentary award (*text in Russian*)

About CivilM+

The international CivilM+ platform was established in 2017. It unites 19 organizations and three independent experts from Ukraine, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and France. Within the CivilM+ network, they contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas. In particular, they inform their governments and communities about the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, implement projects in the spheres of peacebuilding, transitional justice, dialogue and human rights.

Follow the platform news on CivilM+ [Website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

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