



PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS

monthly bulletin

- COVID-19: how the pandemic has 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

The situation with the COVID-19 pandemic in Donbas continues to develop, posing an additional threat to residents of the armed conflict zone in eastern Ukraine. OCHA conducted [analysis](#) of the impact that the spread of COVID-19 has on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, including in Donbas. The report says that as of April 28, 2020, 208 confirmed cases of coronavirus infection were known in areas not controlled by the government of Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and this number doubled in a week. The media report that in the controlled territories, there are around 100 [confirmed](#) cases of the disease.

The media of the self-proclaimed “DPR” and “LPR” continue to assert that “[everything is calm](#)”, and the situation with the pandemic is under control. Mass Media Institute has prepared [analysis](#) of the news reports on this topic and came to the conclusion that journalists from the publications of the so-called “republics” are hiding the facts about the spread of COVID-19 and the problems of medical infrastructure.

NGO coalition "Justice for peace in Donbas" [spoke](#) about measures against the spread of coronavirus undertaken in the so-called “L/DPR”. In the “DPR,” for example, violators of self-isolation will be identified by the “Ministry of State Security” (“MGB”). According to the coalition, this structure was previously known to be involved in torture. And on the territory

of the so-called “LPR” there is a ban on package delivery to prisons. Activists [note](#) that many of these colonies have people held in captivity.

Prisoners of war and civilian hostages are at increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine) initiated a petition, appealing to the international community to urgently respond to the crisis, to seek the release of prisoners and to grant representatives of international humanitarian organizations full access to them. On April 24, at the opening of the Docudays UA documentary film festival on human rights, director and former political prisoner Oleg Sentsov presented the petition. The petition is available in [Ukrainian](#), [Russian](#) and [English](#).

In mid-April, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [called](#) for the Russian Federation, as an occupying state, to protect the life and health of the population of the temporarily occupied territories during the pandemic. It also declared it impossible for Ukraine to access these territories to provide assistance. International organizations have also called for immediate action: [a statement](#) was issued by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and the Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) Yashar Halit Cevik [voiced](#) particular concern in his video address to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna about the ongoing fire during the COVID-19 pandemic in Donbas, including around civilian infrastructure. However, he emphasized that the SMM continued to carry out its tasks helping to reduce threats to the civilian population, despite the restrictions on freedom of movement by the armed forces.

Ongoing calls by the Russian Federation to remove the international sanctions due to the pandemic, were countered by Ukrainian NGOs in [a statement](#) about the inadmissibility of such a step, as "the pandemic did not stop Russia from continuing to occupy parts of the territory of Ukraine."

In the light of the complicated situation with the delivery of humanitarian aid, the inhabitants of small settlements located along the contact line are under risk. For example, 150 residents of the village of Staromaryevka (Volnovakha district of Donetsk region) were in full [isolation](#) without access to grocery stores, medical care and other services. The operational command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine prohibited the crossing of the bridge to the neighboring front-line village from temporarily uncontrolled territories. Another group of people was cut off from their homes due to the closure of the checkpoint in Stanitsa Luganskaya in connection with COVID-19. Their [stories](#) were collected by the Charitable Foundation "Right to protection."

OCHA has developed [a protocol for](#) reducing the risks of spreading COVID-19 in the delivery of humanitarian aid on both sides of the contact line for organizations working in Donbas.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are among the groups most vulnerable to a pandemic. Although a number of inspections have been canceled for them during the quarantine period, and the payment of pensions and social benefits continues without prior mandatory identification, experts [disagree](#) about what possible options there are for the development of this situation after the end of restrictive measures. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) conducted a [webinar](#) “UNHCR Online Legal Advice. In simple words about complex topics: new restrictions on IDPs due to COVID-19.”

Public organizations continue to operate in worsening conditions with the spread of the coronavirus infection. In Slavyansk (Donetsk region), a temporary coordination [center of](#)

[volunteers](#), [joined](#) by Drukarnia Resource Center, was opened as part of a DRA eV project. Volunteers from 15 front-line communities of Donbas [made](#) over 20,000 protective masks with the support of the Proliska Humanitarian Mission, and Charitable Foundation East-SOS launched a [hot line](#) for collecting information about the needs and situation in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Members of the CivilM + platform, the French AEC Civil Assembly (L'Assemblée européenne des citoyens), are participating in a global initiative to bring together people who create and develop solidarity networks around the world in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. The main goal of the initiative is to develop a common map, with information and problems that people face in national contexts.

Doctors from Donbas [note](#) that the provision of regional hospitals with medicines and protective equipment has improved in recent years, but funding will remain inadequate in the coming months. At the same time, the closure of the checkpoints made it [impossible](#) to return home for many residents of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and activists working in Donbas are [alarmed by the](#) development of events and their possible [influence](#) on the situation in the region.

News of CivilM + and member organizations

- April 6, 2020 - CivilM+ member organizations adopted a statement addressing all parties of the conflict in Ukraine about the need for a ceasefire in Donbas in connection with the coronavirus pandemic (*text in [Russian](#), [English](#) [Ukrainian](#)*)
- April 21, 2020 - CivilM + member organizations adopted a statement on the need to strengthen international assistance to Ukraine to effectively deal with the consequences of the pandemic and a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine (*text in [Russian](#), [Ukrainian](#), [English](#)*)
- In anticipation of the meeting of the Normandy Four, which took place online on April 30, CivilM + turned to diplomats and politicians from countries of the Four with a proposal to create an independent civic consulting group to accompany the Minsk negotiations in the Donbass. More details about this in the CivilM + statement of March 24, 2020. (*text in [Russian](#), [Ukrainian](#), [English](#)*). Material by [Radio Liberty](#) on the proposal of CivilM+.
- Truth Hounds published [a report](#) presenting evidence of international crimes committed by both Russian-backed separatist militants and the military of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and representatives of the regular armed forces of the Russian Federation, in the context and in connection with the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. A video presentation of the report is available on its [Facebook page](#) (*text and video in [Ukrainian](#)*)
- The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union held a series of webinars on transitional justice. The topics included: [restoration of trust](#) in authorities in de-occupied territories, the role of [a mixed court](#) as an effective mechanism to hold those guilty of war crimes accountable, [the experience](#) of transitional justice in other countries and its applicability in Ukraine (*text and video in [Ukrainian](#)*)

Political processes and events in the conflict zone

Simultaneous release / exchange of detainees

- April 16, 2020 a simultaneous [exchange](#) of prisoners between Ukraine and the uncontrolled territories took place. [20 people](#) returned to the territory controlled by the government of Ukraine. According to [data](#) from the East Ukrainian Center for Civil Initiatives, more than 50 prisoners have still not been exchanged. On the eve of the exchange, relatives of civilian and military prisoners from the so-called “L/DPR”, who have been held captive for more than two years, recorded a [video message](#) to the president of Ukraine, also [stating](#) a lack of communication with the office of the President. Report on the exchange [prepared](#) by Novaya Gazeta (*text and video in Ukrainian and Russian*)
- [Center for Civil Liberties](#), a member organization of CivilM +, made a statement on the results of the recent release of detainees (*text in [Russian](#), [Ukrainian](#) and [English](#))*)
- April 30, 2020 Foreign Minister of Ukraine Dmitry Kuleba said that a further exchange according to the “all for all” formula is not [foreseen](#) (*text in Russian*)

Negotiations in Donbas: Minsk and Normandy formats

- April 22, 2020 - the latest [meeting](#) of the Tripartite Contact Group (TCG) took place, where the establishment of a working group to create a mechanism for restoring Ukraine’s control over the state border section was discussed, identifying areas for further separation of forces and preparing for the opening of new checkpoints on the demarcation line. The next meeting is [scheduled](#) for May 14 (*text in Ukrainian*)
- April 24, 2020 - Public Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine [proposed](#) to change the concept of the advisory board for Donbas, in order to avoid “hidden recognition of the so-called L/DPR.” Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine [Pavel Klimkin](#) and political scientist [Mikhail Basarab](#) spoke negatively about [the original](#) scheme for the formation of the Council, stating that there should have been representatives of the so-called L/DPR included (*text in Ukrainian, Russian*)
- April 25, 2020 - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [declared](#) “complete sabotage” by Kyiv of the decisions of the Normandy summit (*text in Russian*)
- April 30, 2020 – the next [meeting](#) of the Normandy format took place, which, due to the epidemic of the coronavirus, was held online. According to its results, the German Foreign Minister [called](#) for action to improve the social situation in Donbas. Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, [reported](#) that no progress had been made on the “Steinmeier formula”, as well as on all points of the Paris agreements, except for the exchange of held persons. In turn, the Ukrainian Minister, Dmitry Kuleba [praised](#) the negotiations as “constructive but tense” (*text in Ukrainian, Russian*)
- [Interview](#) with former US Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch on the prospects for the development of negotiations in the Minsk and Normandy formats (*text in Ukrainian*)

Other events

- April 4, 2020 - Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) Yashar Halit Cevik and OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine Henrik Villadsen in a joint statement emphasized the importance and urgency of mine clearance in eastern Ukraine. They said that since the beginning of the year, 12 people have been affected in landmine incidents (*text in [Ukrainian](#), [Russian](#) and [English](#)*)
- April 9, 2020 - Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland came out with a joint [statement](#) urging the Russian Federation to comply with UN Security Council resolution 2166 and to fully cooperate with the criminal investigation into the ongoing investigation of the crash case of flight MH-17 in The Hague. On April 24, The Hague District Court issued a [statement](#) to preserve the anonymity of 12 witnesses in the present case. Later Bellingcat and The Insider [published](#) information on a key person involved in the case.
- April 21, 2020 - Ukraine became chairman of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation (*text in [Ukrainian](#), [English](#)*)
- April 24, 2020 - Russian President Vladimir Putin signed laws [simplifying](#) the procedure to obtain Russian citizenship, including for residents of [Donbas](#) areas not controlled by the government of Ukraine (*text in Russian*)
- Documentation Center of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UGSPL) [said](#) that for the first three months of 2020 due to the conflict in Donbas 72 people were killed, including 30 Ukrainian soldiers, 1 civilian and 41 people from illegal armed formations (*text in Ukrainian*)

Ukrainian Legislative initiatives and analysis of the conflict

- April 9, 2020 - The Democratic Initiatives Foundation published the results of a regional survey of public sentiment in Donbas in February-March 2020. Conclusions from the study in a brief [review](#) (*text in [Ukrainian](#)*)
- April 13, 2020 - text of the [Draft](#) Resolution on the Program of Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine was published. Human rights organizations subjected it to [criticism](#), indicating that it does not contain a sufficiently developed program for the reintegration of temporarily occupied territories and the protection of the rights of persons affected by the conflict in Donbas (*text in Ukrainian*)
- The Ministry of Justice of Ukraine has created a [website](#) that contains information about the cases of Ukraine against Russia in international courts (*text in Ukrainian*)
- the Public Holding “Influence Group” together with regional partners carried out a [study](#) of the efficiency of using public resources to solve the problems of IDPs in the Luhansk region. Experts also [analyzed](#) why communities needed to participate in a temporary housing program for IDPs and prepared a [memo](#) about this program (*text in Ukrainian*)
- The Supreme Court of Ukraine confirmed the right to receive a pension to a resident of a temporarily occupied territory who is not a displaced person (IDP) for the first time. This decision was [analyzed](#) by the Charitable Foundation “Right to protection” (*text in Ukrainian*)

- the Supreme Court of Ukraine issued a [resolution](#) on the claim for state compensation for housing destroyed during the anti-terrorism operation. Lawyers from the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union [analyzed](#) this case, indicating that the decision should become a precedent for other similar cases (*text in Ukrainian*)
- East-SOS Charitable Foundation published a [report](#) on the hotline for recording human rights violations by law enforcement agencies in parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions controlled by the government of Ukraine in March 2020 (*text in Ukrainian*)
- “Right to protection” Charitable Foundation published a [report](#) on the situation with the intersection of the demarcation line through the checkpoints in March 2020 and analyzed [changes](#) in the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in terms of social payments for malware (*text in Ukrainian*)
- East-SOS Charitable Foundation published the results of their monitoring human rights violations in the temporarily occupied parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions in March 2020 (*text in [Ukrainian](#), [Russian](#) and [English](#)*)

Assistance for civilian victims of conflict

- April 28, 2020 - the Docudays UA International Documentary Film Festival on Human Rights held a [discussion](#) called “Children have no place in the war” about protecting the rights of the child in armed conflict and the help that children receive in the “gray zone” (*video in Ukrainian*)
- “Kommersant” published a [report](#) on the life of refugees from Ukraine in Russia 6 years after the beginning of the conflict (*text in Russian*)
- According to the UN, at the end of 2019 at least 500 thousand residents of the uncontrolled territories of Donbas are experiencing acute [difficulties](#) with food (*text in Ukrainian*)

Interviews and journalism

- Local residents of Luhansk and Donetsk regions [recall](#) their impressions of the beginning of the anti-terrorism operation (*text in Russian*)
- “EcoRubrika” media project on the state of the [ecological](#) situation in Donbas and the situation with flooded mines (*video in Russian*)
- Dmitry Kuleba, the head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, spoke about the prospect of the [release](#) of Ukrainian political prisoners held in Russia (*video in Ukrainian*)
- [Discussion](#) “The Easter exchange is over when to expect a new one?” on the exchange of Ukrainian political prisoners and persecuted in Crimea, and Russia, was organized by the “House of Free Russia in Kiev”, the “Center for Civil Liberties” and the “Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” in cooperation with the Internet publication “Trati” (*video in Russian and Ukrainian*)

- [Stories](#) by prisoners who were not included in the recent exchange in the report by “Ukrainian Truth” (*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.

Implemented with the support of the German government in the framework of the project “Dialogue for mutual understanding and law: European NGOs together for overcoming the conflict in the Donbass”. The selection of news presented in the newsletter is subjective.

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