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humanitarian mission
PROLISKA



PROTECTION MONITORING

In selected settlements along the contact line in eastern Ukraine

Period: February – May 2021

Acknowledgements

UNHCR is grateful for the extensive involvement and support of UNHCR's partners, local authorities, civil society, and international organizations. Most importantly, UNHCR would like to acknowledge the resilience and strength of those forcibly displaced and otherwise affected by conflict in Ukraine, who continue to share with us their challenges, hopes and fears on a daily basis.

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Cover photo:

Social support specialist of the UNHCR partner NGO "Humanitarian center "Proliska - Avdiivka" conducts an interview with a resident as part of protection monitoring exercise, Novobakhmutivka village, Donetsk oblast, March 2021 @UNHCR/Proliska: Nadiya Shostak.

Content

Introduction	4
Methodology	7
Protection monitoring findings	8
Conflict-related security concerns	9
Access to Social and Administrative Services	11
Livelihoods and Commercial Services	14
Transport and Communication	17
Access to Healthcare	19
Access to Education / Recreational Facilities	21
Utilities	22
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	23
Non-conflict related security issues	24
Freedom of Movement	26
Main Conclusions	27
Recommendations	28

Introduction

After seven years of conflict in eastern Ukraine, the July 2020 ceasefire brought a marked reduction in hostilities and civilian casualties and helped reduce the mental stress triggered by the constant fear of being harmed. With an increase in hostilities in 2021, the continued impact of conflict-related insecurity as well as new consequences of the conflict are very much felt by the people living close to the contact line and limits their enjoyment of rights and well-being.

In this context, UNHCR, together with its local NGO partner Proliska, rolled out a protection monitoring tool in February 2021 to identify the main protection concerns faced by communities living close to the conflict line and analyse these to inform our collective understanding of the main needs of this population, the capacities of the communities and of service providers and the priority needs for humanitarian and development support programs. As such, protection monitoring offers an evidence-based overview of civilians' living conditions and levels of access to essential services that can assist the authorities and humanitarian and development actors in their decision-making and prioritization of programs. The findings will also inform strategic cooperation between humanitarian and development partners within the framework of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus.



With funding from the European Union, UNHCR and its partner NGO Proliska provided 228 bicycles and 35 electric tricycles to communities located near the contact line in eastern Ukraine. Now volunteers can provide help in isolated localities, reach more people with home-based care (bringing food, pensions and medical assistance), 2021. © UNHCR/Pavlo Pakhomenko



156 monitored settlements,

including 98 settlements in the 0 to 5km area



360,700 persons

living in the monitored settlements



2,300 interviews

conducted with Key Informants



111 participants

in community consultations

There have been notable and much appreciated steps by the Government of Ukraine to alleviate the suffering of conflict-affected people, including legal and policy developments on the protection of IDPs, compensation mechanisms for damaged houses, national mine action systems, improvements in infrastructure and availability of services at Entry-Exit Crossing Points (EECPs) and measures taken to enhance service provision at local level. A specific example is the development of mobile social and administrative services (such as mobile social workers, mobile TSNAPS and on-line portals for administrative services), which also represents one of the strategic objectives of the decentralisation reform, bringing State services closer to communities. In this regard, the protection monitoring also seeks to monitor the impact of measures implemented by local authorities and support the Government of Ukraine to further strengthen service delivery and their leadership role in the humanitarian response in affected communities.

UNHCR, with its partner Proliska, has conducted protection monitoring in a total of 156 settlements in government-controlled areas (GCA) close to the contact line in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The monitoring covered all 98 isolated settlements located within 5km of the contact line and an additional 58 settlements located between 5 to 20km from the contact line (see map below). The latter group corresponds to 23% of the total number of settlements (248) located in the 5 to 20km area, and at least 11% of the total population living in the same zone¹. Of the monitored settlements, 95 are located in Donetsk Oblast and 61 in Luhansk Oblast.

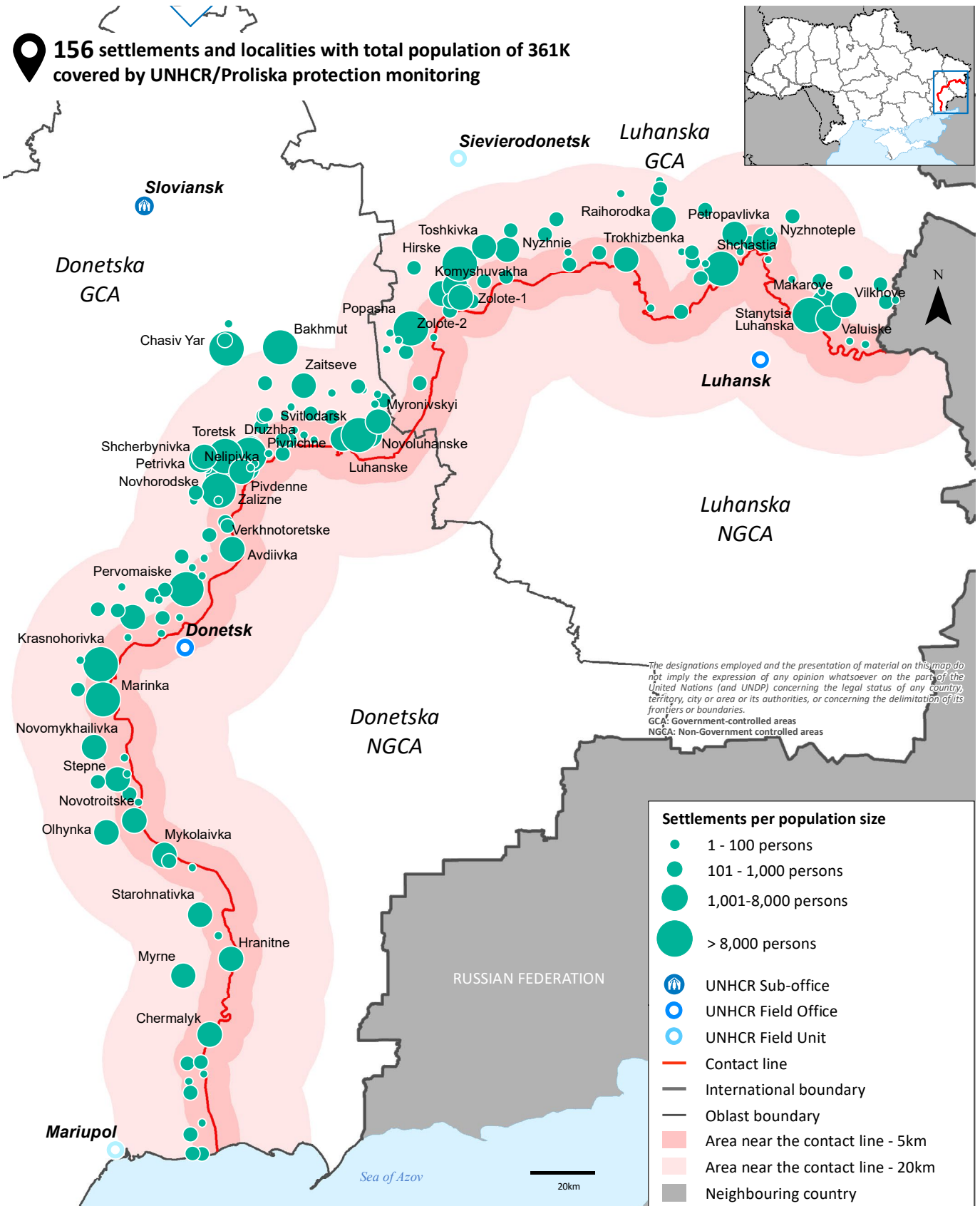
The monitored settlements represent a total population of 360,700 residents, including 232,800 persons (65 per cent) living in the 98 isolated settlements 0 to 5km from the contact line. Because the last population census in Ukraine was conducted in 2001 and considering population movements and forced displacement as a result of the conflict, the demographics and profile of the population presented in this report are based on reports and information gathered from local authorities and/or key informants. Therefore, the information on age, gender and diversity profiles of the population living in the monitored settlements is limited and based on non-official estimates.

According to key informants (KIs), the population living in the monitored settlements include over 48,000 children (13 per cent). Although data on the breakdown of age and gender of residents was not available to KIs in all monitored settlements, the latest Humanitarian Needs Overview for Ukraine suggest that, in the area where the protection monitoring was conducted, the affected population includes 37 per cent older persons, 55 per cent women and 15 per cent of persons with disabilities². The presence of some minority groups (mainly Roma, but also Greek, Tatar and German) were reported in 13 settlements.

¹ Total population in the zone of 5-20 km from the Line of Contact is 1,098,099 residents (source: 2001 population census)

² [Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), Ukraine, 2021.

156 settlements and localities with total population of 361K covered by UNHCR/Proliska protection monitoring



Methodology

Settlements were selected considering location (isolated, hard to reach areas close to the contact line) and UNHCR's and Proliska's presence, existing relationships with communities and knowledge of the humanitarian situation based on previous assessments, in particular with regard to security and access to essential services.

The data was collected on site by Proliska field staff, through [structured interviews](#) with key informants (KIs) and observation, during February to May 2021. KIs were selected based on their roles in the community and/or knowledge on certain aspects of community life, and include residents, community leaders, local authorities, service providers, teachers, security officers etc. A total of 2,312 interviews were conducted with approximately 800 KIs, including 71 per cent women KIs.

Once the quantitative data was consolidated, the results for nine monitored settlements³ presenting critical or severe index values (see severity scale below) were reviewed through focus group consultations with 111 residents. The purpose of these was to review the findings and identify causes for the main problems, community priorities, coping mechanisms and response capacities. Of the total number of participants in the community consultations, half were women, 31 per cent were older persons, 11 per cent were persons with disabilities and 8 per cent were IDPs.

For the purposes of data analysis, and to facilitate the identification of geographic and thematic hotspots, the results were grouped under an Index System that comprises ten protection topics and five categories of severity of protection gaps and concerns:



Focus group discussion in Trokhizbenka, Luhanska oblast, 2021 @UNHCR

Thematic Indexes – Protection Concerns/Issues	Severity of Protection Concerns	Value Range
Conflict-related Security Concerns	None/minimal	0
Access to Social and Administrative Services		
Livelihoods and Commercial Services	Limited	0.1-0.25
Transportation and Communication		
Access to Healthcare	Moderate	0.26-0.50
Access to Education / Recreational Facilities		
Utilities	Severe	0.51-0.75
Gender-based Violence (GBV)		
Non-conflict related Security Issues	Critical	0.76-1
Freedom of Movement		

The detailed results, including the breakdown of indices and affected population per settlement, is available at the online [Protection Monitoring Dashboard](#).

³ Selected settlements in Donetsk Oblast: Bakhmutka; Berdianske; Myrne; Taramchuk; Verkhnotoretske; and Myronivka. Selected settlements in Luhansk Oblast: Bobrove; Trokhizbenka; Troitske

Protection monitoring findings

According to the findings of the protection monitoring, two elements are crosscutting to all protection concerns and are root causes for many other protection gaps and concerns for the affected population in eastern Ukraine: the prevailing volatility of the security situation, due to ongoing hostilities and extensive land contamination by mines/ERW; and the isolation of communities from State institutions and markets, due to lack of transportation and communications. Although to varying degrees, both elements are interlinked with the impact observed on freedom of movement, livelihoods, access to social and administrative services, healthcare, education and the overall situation of utilities available in settlements located along the contact line.

More recently, progress in the administrative decentralization process⁴ added another layer of challenges to the situation and raised concerns over the disproportionate impact on conflict-affected communities in the short and long term. The fact that the reform is being implemented at the various administrative levels (at central, *Oblast*, *Raion* and Territorial Communities) simultaneously but not in a synchronized manner and that most processes are still incomplete, has resulted in disruptions in provision and access to essential services in communities where humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities were already acute.

The analysis of the average indices shows that the more severe protection concerns were found in relation to *Access to Social and Administrative Services; Livelihoods and Commercial*



UNHCR staff is talking to a local woman in a village that was badly damaged during the 2014 fighting in Luhanska oblast @UNHCR / Petr Shelomovskiy

Services; Healthcare; Security (conflict and non-conflict related) and Transportation and Communications. In focus group discussions, communities also added Access to Healthcare as a priority concern, likely related to the fact that 37 per cent of the population along the contact are older persons.

In addition to the common concerns impacting all monitored settlements, the protection monitoring also shows that settlements located in the area between 0 to 5km from the contact line are disproportionately affected by protection concerns related to *Conflict-related Security Concerns* and *Freedom of Movement*. The impact of restrictions on freedom of movement was reported critical in only two settlements located at least 5km from the contact line, while in the 0 to 5km area at least 29 settlements reported a critical or severe impact on their right to freedom of movement.

This report reviews the results of protection monitoring carried out from 1 February to 31 May 2021 by thematic index. The findings presented below should be considered as indicative of the broader protection trends and issues, while recognizing that results are therefore not definitive.

⁴For a more detailed analysis, please see the Protection Cluster «[Note on the Impact of the ongoing Decentralization Process in communities affected by the conflict in the eastern Region](#)», March 2021.

Conflict-related security concerns

Although the July 2020 ceasefire has brought marked reductions of hostilities and civilian casualties since the beginning of the armed conflict, the security situation continues to shape the humanitarian situation and the lives of communities located along the contact line. Ongoing ceasefire violations, shelling, landmine contamination, damages to civilian houses, civilian casualties and critical infrastructure damage were reported in 120 (77 per cent) of the monitored settlements, where 239,500 persons live – including 87 settlements with a population of 221,600 located in the 0 to 5km area.

“If you come back today at 6pm, you will “hear” what our problems are”.

Participant in Focus group discussion in Bakhmutka (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021), referring to loud shelling.

To carry on with their lives, residents of these communities must limit their movements, observe informal curfews, and live without regular access to basic utilities. In community consultations, residents of Bobrove (Luhansk) reported that *“at 4pm we have to sit at home and cannot go out”*, while residents of Trokhizbenka and Myronivka (Donetsk) reported that street lighting was turned off due to military reasons and the proximity of the village to the contact line. In some groups, communities reported that even though shelling does not hit their villages directly, they can still hear it every night in the surrounding villages.

A common element reported by all settlements where security concern

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	36	121,259
Limited	66	85,239
Moderate	33	39,134
Severe	17	38,857
Critical	4	76,242



The woman sitting in front of the window in the damaged house near the contact line, Debaltseve, Donetsk oblast. ©UNHCR/Evgeny Maloletka

were raised (any index score above 0) was the impact of mine contamination in their daily lives. Ukraine ranks **fifth in the world** for civilian casualties as a result of landmines and ERW. The Government estimated that **16 thousand square kilometres** of Ukrainian territory is contaminated with mines and explosive devices, which pose threats to the lives of around 2 million people. According to the protection monitoring results, the extensive mine contamination has a moderate or serious impact on the daily lives of persons living in 124 (79 per cent) of the monitored settlements – including 86 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area (88 per cent of the total settlements in the area). More than half of the total number of settlements (86) reporting that the presence of mines impacts their daily lives are located in Donetsk Oblast.

During the four months of protection monitoring, at least four settlements constantly reported being critically impacted by conflict-related security concerns - Avdiivka in Donetsk Oblast; and Petropavlivka, Trokhizbenka,

“How safe is it? We still have people exploding on mines and shooting everywhere.”

Participant in focus group discussion in Verkhnotoretske (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021).

and Shchastia in Luhansk Oblast – particularly due to mine contamination. It is worth noting that in April the security situation deteriorated due to the increased bellicose rhetoric, scaled-up military presence, intensification of ceasefire violations and use of heavy weapons. As a result, protection monitoring found that four times more residents of monitored settlements were exposed to shelling (approximately 49,000 persons).

In the 21 settlements where the severity score of conflict-related security concerns reached severe or critical levels, both shelling and landmine contamination were always reported. All settlements are located in the 0 to 5km area close to the contact line, which points to the disproportionate impact of the conflict in this geographical zone.

Transportation companies do not provide services in many of the conflict-affected communities, reportedly because of the volatility of the security environment, the presence of military checkpoints and bad conditions of roads or damaged bridges (in many instances, as a result of the hostilities). In turn, the

“We water the garden while listening to the bullets and shelling nearby. You can only cry or leave”

Participant in focus group discussion in Bakhmutka (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021).

lack of regular, affordable and predictable transportation services impacts 10,300 persons living in 53 (34 per cent) of the monitored settlements and is the core reason for the gap in access to the State social protection system for conflict-affected communities. Without transportation, residents of isolated settlements are unable reach the main urban centres where social and administrative services are provided, while authorities in eastern Ukraine also have limited capacity to provide mobile services in those locations. For example, 24 settlements, all within 5km of the contact line, reported that Emergency Medical Services are totally unable to respond to critical medical cases because authorities consider these areas unsafe for health workers. In case of injuries due to shelling and mines, the local population relies on health assistance provided by the military, while for other medical emergencies access to healthcare is a challenge.

Conflict-related security issues are also the main reason for significant losses in terms of livelihoods and persisting dependency on humanitarian aid. Before the conflict, communities reported relying mostly on tourism, agriculture, businesses, and fishing. However, because of the conflict-related security situation and presence of mines/UXOs, communities lost their main sources of livelihoods and were left with no alternative source of subsistence. Land contamination is responsible not only for preventing residents from using land for agriculture or accessing the sea for fishing, but is also the [main cause of civilian casualties since the ceasefire](#). Due to lack of alternatives, some residents continue to risk their lives carrying out activities in mine-contaminated lands.

Access to basic utilities and communications is also directly affected by ongoing hostilities and the presence of landmines. During community consultations, some groups reported that between 2015 and 2016, their communities were permanently cut off from electricity supply or street lighting, as the area was too close to the contact line. On the other hand, communities struggle to find alternative sources of energy for cooking and heating. as landmine contamination prohibits the collection of firewood nearby.



Yuryi and Tetiana stand in the ruins of their home in Nikishino, Donetsk Oblast. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

“The village lived from the summer season: summer cottages, recreation centres, fishing, touristic services. Because of the conflict, all dachas (summer cottages) were burnt. Access to the sea is mined. Now the village is closed, tourists do not come, the infrastructure is destroyed, all is ruined”

Participant in focus group discussion in Berdianske (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021)



Two women approach a checkpoint and a sign warning of landmines in the village of Hnutove in war-torn Donetsk oblast, 2017.

© UNHCR/Tania Bulakh

Access to Social and Administrative Services

The protection monitoring reviewed communities’ access to essential protection services provided by the State, namely the Department of Social Protection; Pension Fund; TSNAPs⁵ (including mobile); Social Workers; State Migration Services (SMS) and Post Offices. These State institutions are responsible for the registration of IDPs, case management, provision of specialized protection services (such as home-based care for older persons and persons with disabilities, services for the older persons) and payment of pensions and are the entry point for access to social benefits, pensions, civil documents and other administrative services.

The *Critical* level of severity in *Access to Social and Administrative Services* was recorded in 35 per cent of the monitored settlements. The issue is of extreme importance

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	3	84,812
Limited	20	166,399
Moderate	39	83,917
Severe	39	20,596
Critical	55	5,007

to communities and limitations on access to State services has a disproportionate impact due to the profile of the population living close to the contact line – mostly older persons, persons with disabilities and highly vulnerable families, who are highly dependent on the State social protection system (with pensions and payments of social benefits being their main source of subsistence). In the settlement of Trokhizbenka, for instance, 62 per cent of the population are pensioners. Precisely because of this critical level of limitations, provision of humanitarian protection services continues to fill a gap in the protection of conflict-affected populations in the area.

⁵ TNAPs are Centers for Provision of Administrative Services, including the registration of civil status and residence, issuance of identity documents, registration of businesses, property and real state, amongst other issues

In the monitored settlements, a total of 153 settlements hosting 276,000 persons reported at least one impediment to effective access to social and administration services. The situation is particularly critical in the settlements located in the 0 to 5km area along the contact line: in 95 per cent of those settlements, access to at least one of the monitored social and administrative services was reported as lacking, while 63 per cent face severe or critical gaps in their access to several essential protection services.

Social services such as the Department of Social Protection or the Pension Fund are not available within most of the settlements monitored. Half of the settlements have access within walking distance⁶ or can access the service in nearby settlements by public transportation routes, while up to 19,000 people, dispersed in small settlements (with an average 200 people each), lack access to either one or both services and public transportation

Offices of the Departments of Social Protection (DoSP) are present in only 14 of the monitored settlements (where over 100,500 persons live), which means that in other locations, residents need to take public transportation whenever they need to reach the DoSP. According to KIs, in 65 settlements the population (of approximately 144,000 persons) can access DoSP through public transportation, which is available at least once a week or once a day. In the remaining 77 settlements with no DoSP offices, residents face significant challenges to reach its offices due to limited or total lack of public transportation. The difficult access to DoSP services is mostly a problem in smaller settlements located in the 0 to 5km area, with average populations of 200 residents.

The presence of offices of the Pension Fund is as limited as the DoSP – they are located in only 10 of the monitored settlements. In 67 settlements people can reach Pension Fund offices by public



UNHCR and its partner NGOs in east Ukraine placed WHO COVID-19 posters in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to raise awareness on coronavirus among local population, 2020 © NGO Proliska

transportation, however in the remaining 79 settlements (where 12,500 persons live), residents have limited or no access to public transportation.

Social workers are essential to persons with limited mobility, older persons and vulnerable families, however, their capacity to reach remote communities, through mobile social workers, does not seem to cover all the needs. In 83 settlements, where 25,000 persons live, KIs reported that there were no visits from State social workers to vulnerable people with low mobility in the three months prior to the interview. In 27 of these settlements, the share of older people (estimated from the number of pensioners in the settlements) is more than 70 per cent of total population.

As of May, six monitored settlements had established a TSNAP in the village or within a 3km distance. Residents of all other settlements must rely on public transportation (which is not available in half of the monitored settlements) to access its administrative services. Mobile services do not always sufficiently cover small settlements along the contact line and during community consultations residents reported that their settlements did not receive visits of mobile TSNAPs.

According to participants in focus group discussions, the main reasons for this critical situation in terms of access to social and administrative services are the lack of transportation and volatile security in the area. As one resident explained, there is a vicious cycle in which residents of settlements located along the contact line are more affected by the impact of the conflict due to volatile security, mine contamination and shelling, and because of that, they have less access to livelihoods and have higher needs in terms of access to State social protection; however, they cannot access State services due to lack of transportation, which is not available because private companies refuse to go to areas where the security situation is volatile, risks are higher and numbers of residents are low, so the route is not profitable from their point of view. Although residents recognize that before the conflict there were already challenges in terms of access, all of them agreed that the situation became more acute due to the ongoing hostilities.

In this context, progress in the administrative decentralization in Ukraine added another layer of challenges related to access to social and administrative services. The ongoing rearrangement of geographical coverage of Rayons

⁶ For the purposes of protection monitoring, the length of “walking distance” is considered up to 3km.

“When we go to Volnovakha, authorities say they no longer cover our settlement, and refer us to Sartana. But when we go to Sartana, they say they are not yet covering our settlement because of bureaucratic pending issues. This period is making things more unclear and we are getting confused. However, we expect positive changes once we are under Sartana ATC”

Participant in focus group discussion in Berdianske (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021)

and Territorial Communities (TCs), and the transfer of functions on provision of essential services from regional to local level – most of which still incomplete and not always synchronized – led to disruptions in access and provision of services.

Communities recognized that, once the process is complete, they will benefit from more proximity to State service providers. Nonetheless, residents reported that during this transitional stage, governmental leadership at the local level is unclear and residents face even more difficulties in terms of access to transportation. On one hand, residents are not always sure where to go to access services; while authorities, on the other hand, are also unable to fulfil their responsibility for the provision of services while the decentralization process is not fully completed.

In relation to transportation, communities reported in focus group discussions that the locations where they were supposed to go to access service centres and administrative hubs are not covered by public transportation routes. In some cases, residents used to have access to transportation, but the route only goes to the previous service centre, which is no longer responsible for covering their settlement. This means that people in some settlements cannot reach the centre where services would be available. In other cases, a transportation route is available, but the schedules are not suitable for the working hours of the State institution. Some residents claim they have no alternative but to rent accommodation in a different city to be able to finalize all intended procedures with State institutions.

The lack of reliable communication networks and presence of social institutions, banks, ATMs, post offices and mobile services in most of the settlements along the contact line means that public transportation is the only way to bridge the gap between conflict-affected communities and State institutions. Alternatives for public and affordable transportation is still a persistent gap in villages along the contact line, as detailed further below in a dedicated section.

Post offices or mobile postal services (such as the mobile delivery of pensions) are not available in 46 settlements (where 4,200 persons live), including 36 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area. Bank services within walking distance (both through branch offices or ATMs) are unavailable in 123 settlements (79 per cent of the total number of monitored settlements, where 55,000 persons live), including 72 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area, which is once again disproportionately affected by gaps under this index. Of the 123 settlements where bank services are not available, 75 settlements (where over 12,000 persons live) also lack access to public transportation. In these locations, older people have to trust their neighbours to collect their pensions, according to community consultations.

Finally, considering the abovementioned challenges, the protection monitoring activity also assessed the availability of community centres or other informal spaces that could provide opportunities for community mobilization. Spaces for gatherings are important for social cohesion and other activities, such as the provision of humanitarian assistance, psychosocial services, recreation for children, and especially to allow residents to organize themselves and be able to advocate for their priorities and interests before authorities. These centres can also be used by mobile teams of administrative, social or health services to deliver services at the local level. Half of the monitored settlements (78) reported that residents have no public spaces for meetings in the communities.



Internally displaced children from conflict-affected areas of Donetsk attend a community center, supported by UNHCR and run by NGO Maximal in Donetska oblast, 2017 © NGO Maximal/Olga Tseselskaya

Livelihoods and Commercial Services

Before the conflict, the Donbas region (including the totality of what was then the territories of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts) used to be the most densely populated and industrially productive part of the country. At the same time, the region was already characterized by lower wages, high numbers of youth leaving the region for better opportunities and an ageing population. The conflict, therefore, had a significant impact on an already disproportionately economically affected area – with evasion of big companies, disruptions of supply chains and market links and deterioration of infrastructure, resulting in further unemployment and pushing communities into poverty⁷.

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	4	137,681
Limited	32	143,061
Moderate	46	60,781
Severe	46	18,017
Critical	28	1,191

“I lost my job because of the conflict, but I am still not at retirement age – I am living in a limbo, between heaven and Earth”

Participant in the focus group discussion in Bakhmutka (Donetsk Oblast)



Focus group discussion in Trokhizbenka, Luhansk oblast. © UNHCR

As confirmed in community consultations, gaps in livelihoods and commercial services are one of the top concerns reported in the monitored settlements located close to the contact line, together with security concerns and access to social and administrative services. It is worth noting that men would often rate the priority of this problem higher than women.

During the protection monitoring activities, 97 per cent (152) of the monitored settlements reported gaps related to livelihoods and commercial services – including lack of access to employment opportunities, markets,

employment centres, groceries and/or bank services. Notably, only in 4 settlements covered by protection monitoring, the population considers that they have sufficient access to livelihoods and commercial services and all of these are large towns with good infrastructure and regular access to public transportation. Out of 74 settlements (where more than 19,000 persons live) reporting severe to critical gaps related to livelihoods, at least 50 are located in the 0 to 5km area (with an average population of 260 residents per settlement).

The security situation, landmine contamination, presence of the military, demographics of the population, the disruption of markets and public transportation all play a major role in the severity of this index, with the armed conflict highlighted in community consultations as the root cause for all limitations in access to livelihoods and commercial services.

During focus group discussions, residents of monitored settlements explained that, before the conflict, most of the population used to be employed in industries, plants and the tourist sector or relied on selling agricultural and

⁷Humanitarian Needs Overview, Ukraine, 2021.

“I wanted to get a job, found an appropriate option. They told me to come the following day. I did. But when they saw my age in my documents, they hired someone else.”

Participant at the focus group discussion in Taramchuk (Donetsk Oblast)

fishing products in bigger cities. Since the conflict started, however, a large proportion of the enterprises that used to employ the local population remained in the Non-Government Controlled Area or closed completely due to disruptions in the supply and market chains, resulting in job losses without the corresponding level of access to alternative employment in nearby locations. According to the protection monitoring, approximately 126,000 residents of 78 settlements (of which 52 are in the 0 to 5km area) have no access to employment opportunities in their own settlements or in neighbouring ones. In an additional 50 settlements, it was

“Before the conflict, there was a shop in the village – but the owner left after the conflict started in 2014. His shop could no longer bring goods because it was not cost-effective to drive and fuel is expensive”

“We live on mutual assistance”

Participant in focus group discussion in Myronivka (Donetsk Oblast)



Residents in eastern Ukraine cross the checkpoint between the government-controlled area and non-government-controlled area in Mayorsk, Donetsk oblast, 2018. © UNHCR/Anastasia Vlasova

noted that employment could potentially be found in neighbouring areas - however, residents highlighted that access depended directly on the availability of public transportation which, in turn, was not available in 60 per cent of those 50 settlements.

Even where public transportation is available, the service schedule is sometimes reported as an issue. For instance, in Verkhnotoretske (2,200 residents), the train resumed operations in 2019, after five years of interruption, providing residents with an alternative to commute to work in nearby locations. In 2021, however, KIs reported that the train schedule changed, and the train was no longer an option for employed residents, as with the new departure hours they could no longer arrive in time for work.

There are only six employment centres in the monitored area, all of which are located in bigger towns beyond the 0 to 5km area. The KIs mentioned that their communities would have been able to register as unemployed and have more opportunities to find jobs if the employment centres were more accessible. Since public transportation is not available in most of the affected settlements, these centres are hard to reach for the population. Unemployment is reportedly also caused by the demographics of the conflict affected population, with frequent instances of discrimination from employers against the population due to their advanced age.

Relying on agriculture, fishing or cattle also became more difficult for two main reasons. Firstly, because the population lost access to the main city centres where they used to sell products – as the cities ended up located in the Non-Government Controlled Area. In this regard, the lack of regular public transportation left fewer alternatives for selling products in markets of other bigger cities in nearby areas and in 17 settlements (where 5,500 persons live) KIs reported that residents do not have access to an alternative local market. The second main reason reported by communities is the presence of military and extensive mine contamination that followed the beginning of hostilities, which resulted in loss of access to agricultural and pasture lands, as well as to the sea. As mentioned in the sections above, more than 185,000 residents of 86 settlements in the 0 to 5km area experience limitations in their daily lives due to the presence of mines/UXOs. Communities lost access to land for grazing

and their cattle died due to mine contamination. In coastal settlements in Donetsk Oblast, communities who used to make a living from tourism and fishing explained that it is no longer an option due to mining of seashores and military presence in communities.

Agriculture was also a source of subsistence to some families whom, due to mine contamination and limitations of access to land in their communities, must purchase goods from local shops. According to the protection monitoring results, access to groceries within walking distance is not available in 50 settlements (of which 66 per cent are located in the 0 to 5km area). Within this group, mobile grocery shops are occasionally available in at least 17

settlements, but usually with products at higher prices and with a limited variety of items (hygiene items are reportedly rarely available in mobile shops). Prices are reportedly inflated particularly in locations where the military is present, as they can afford to pay more in comparison to residents. Of the 50 total settlements without walking-distance access to groceries, 37 settlements have no access to public transportation.

In Myronivka, for instance, communities explained that the nearest food market is 7km away, but most of the villagers are older persons or have a disability, which makes them fully dependent on mobile services or the support of other villagers or humanitarian agencies. It is worth noting that some communities reported relying on family gardens to complement their food intake with vegetables.

Finally, monitored settlements reported that access to post offices and banks is a challenge, particularly in isolated settlements located in the 0 to 5km area. Most of the population living close to the contact line is vulnerable and largely older - many with limited mobility and highly reliant on payments of pensions and social benefits to cover their basic needs (particularly in a context of limited access to livelihoods and transportation). In this regard, it is particularly important for them to have access to a bank (branch or ATM) or a post office (where pensions are collected).



Residents of remote villages in eastern Ukraine come to withdraw their pensions from the Oshchadbank (state-owned bank) department at the Novotroitske border crossing checkpoint, Donetsk oblast, 2018 © UNHCR/Anastasia Vlasova

Transport and Communication

Access to public transportation and other means of communication were repeatedly mentioned by KIs and participants in focus group discussions as a major concern and a crosscutting issue impacting access to social services, healthcare, livelihoods, markets, banks and education.

As mentioned in previous sections, authorities are not always able to access communities located close to the contact line due to security reasons, their limited capacity or the conditions of the roads. Therefore, the population of the conflict affected areas, especially small settlements situated in 0 to 5km zone, largely depend on public transportation to access basic state services. In many community consultations, participants stressed that the availability of regular and affordable public transportation determines whether the residents of a particular settlement will have access to employment and livelihoods. A total of 80 settlements have very limited or no access at all to public transportation, affecting over 12,500 persons living in these locations.

Small settlements in the 0 to 5km zone present more severe levels of lack of access to public

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	46	278,359
Limited	40	70,376
Moderate	29	9,655
Severe	27	1,967
Critical	14	374

transportation. In this particular area, 35 settlements (with 2,700 residents) have no access to public transportation at all, while 18 settlements (with 7,600 residents) have insufficient, irregular or seasonal access to transportation. In the latter case, communities rely entirely on humanitarian organizations (whose transportation projects or individual protection assistance depend on the availability of funding and are usually for a limited period of time) or have access to transportation that only covers the settlement a few times per week or one time per day.

Communities explained in focus group discussions that the immediate implications of such arrangements are, firstly, that people do not have the means to commute for work in another location; and secondly, depending on the available schedule, some people need to arrange accommodation elsewhere in order to access social and administrative services as the hours interfere with working hours and the “first come first served” schedules of State institutions. For example, even when public transportation is available once a week or in nearby locations, the window of time between departures and returns is not always enough for residents who need to queue for access to healthcare, social services, bureaucratic administrative procedures or work. In Taramchuk, residents have to walk 3km to take the bus that departs once a week and one time during the assigned day at 8am, returning at 3pm. In Bakhmutka buses depart only once a week and the window of time between the departure (6h30am) and return (12pm) is not enough to access basic services due to large queues. In any case, commuting to a regular job is impossible through the existing public transportation routes.

“There is no mobile network. We usually go out into the nearby fields to find network. Now the military personnel at least allow us to do so.”

Participant in focus group discussion in Myronivka (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021).

In settlements where public transportation is not available or enough to cover the residents’ needs, they rely on private taxis or joint trips with neighbours, considered expensive and with long waiting periods in any case. According to focus group discussions, a one-way trip to the main service centres may cost from 10 to 30 per cent of a monthly pension (from 300 UAH to 1000 UAH).

As mentioned in previous sections, the volatility of the security environment, presence of military checkpoints and bad conditions of roads are reportedly the main reasons why transportation companies refuse to provide services in such areas. In addition, residents claimed that the very low number of people living in the communities, high security risks and the road conditions make the provision of transportation a non-lucrative or expensive service even for private companies. For instance, in the 0 to 5km area, it is only possible to access 22 of the 98 total settlements through an unpaved road, which is not accessible for most types of vehicles during winter or wet seasons.



*A man with two children boards a bus at the crossing checkpoint in Mariinka, as he travels to the non-government-controlled area, 2018.
© UNHCR/Anastasia Vlasova*

“By the time you get to Kurakhovo (the main service centre covering his settlement), it is already midday. If you do not have enough time to finish your businesses and errands, then you will have to find a place to stay overnight. There were times in which I had to stay for almost three days in Kurakhovo due to lack of transportation to return home”

Participant in focus group discussion in Taramchuk (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021)

In addition to transportation, the poor coverage of mobile networks is largely reported as another main concern to the population of the conflict affected area. A total of 74 settlements hosting 64,300 residents reported having intermittent or no access at all to mobile network (of which, 43 settlements with 56,000 residents are located in the 0 to 5km area). Participants in focus group discussions, who are living in isolated communities, report additional stress due to difficulties in calling ambulances, police, fire fighters or contacting relatives in case of emergencies.

Internet connection is equally challenging and affects mostly communities located in the 0 to 5km area, where the demographics of the population include a larger number of older persons and persons with limited mobility, often in a worse situation of isolation. In more than half (51) of the settlements located in the 0 to 5km area, access to the internet is limited or not available at all. Of the monitored settlements, half (82) reported that access to the internet is limited or not available at all. Participants in focus group discussions mentioned that due to internet limitations children cannot attend online classes, while adults cannot make payments online, increasing dependency on bank branches or ATMs – which, as mentioned, are not available within walking distance in 46 settlements. Access to mobile networks and internet connection is essential not only in pandemic times, where most of the affected population rely on remote provision of services, but also because of the extensive efforts made by the State to digitalize the provision of administrative and social services.

Access to Healthcare

The protection monitoring assessed the access of the population to medical facilities (including services in neighbouring settlements), pharmacies and ambulance coverage. Availability of public transport and road conditions were taken into consideration to measure the level of access for locations where a medical facility is not available in the settlement.

While for the majority of the population along the contact line, basic health care services (through medical facilities or the presence

“Doctors without borders used to come. It was really great.”

Participant in focus group discussion in Taramchuk (Donetsk Oblast, June 2021)

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	29	231,464
Limited	58	115,253
Moderate	20	9,790
Critical	37	3,502
Severe	12	722

of medical staff in the settlements) are available in their settlement, in 51 settlements (6,100 residents) they are not. The situation is particularly dire in 39 small settlements, which have no public transportation. In another 16 settlements (1,900 residents) health services are available in the neighbouring settlements.

The absence of any healthcare providers within the settlement significantly affects older people and people with disabilities, as the need to cover the cost of transportation and reliance on external support for travel prompts many to postpone healthcare appointments. Due to the reorganization of healthcare provision and the impact of the decentralization process, people report a decrease of specialists and insufficient quality of services provided. For example, many family doctors have discontinued the practice of home visits, especially in remote locations. In many locations people report multiple chronic conditions, which have been exacerbated by the years of living in stress in



Maryna, 56, is standing near the window in her apartment in Svitlodarsk, Donetsk region, Ukraine. For Maryna, a cancer survivor, who lives just two kilometers from the frontline, living amid conflict has been devastating, 2019. © UNHCR/Oksana Parafeniuk



Natalia stands in front of her house, Klynove, Donetsk oblast. © UNHCR/Artem Hetman

a conflict affected area and lack of access to treatment. Thus, the lack of access to specialized care within the settlement and the need to travel 30 to 70 km is felt acutely and has been highlighted in most focus group discussions both in Donetsk and in Luhansk oblast. Adjusting to the new system of healthcare provision is reported as a challenge, considering that specialized doctors are available only in larger towns and the affected population faces personal mobility challenges and the lack of public transportation. The limited schedule of available transportation often does not coincide with the reception hours of health facilities in the urban centres of Popasna, Kostiantynivka, Bakhmut or Mariupol.

Access to healthcare services is affected by the ongoing hostilities, making it unsafe for emergency medical services (EMS) to access

locations with critical security situations. Notwithstanding the support provided by military doctors for injuries related to hostilities, 5,200 people residing in 24 settlements in the 0 to 5km area lack reliable and predictable emergency medical assistance as ambulances services are not available. Of them, 15 settlements (with 2,310 residents) lack any medical services. In settlements which are covered by the ambulance services, the response time is between 1 and 2.5 hours. The arrival of the ambulances is delayed due to long distance from, poor road conditions, and checkpoints. In the context of the decentralisation reform, some settlements are dependent on EMS stations which are not necessarily the most closely located. In Verkhnotoretske residents suggested that their settlement could be covered by the EMS based in neighbouring Novhorodske instead of Ocheretyne, which is 30 km away.

Availability and prompt response by ambulances is particularly critical for older people, who often have cardiovascular and other conditions requiring urgent medical assistance and comprise the majority of the population. In areas further away from the contact line ambulance coverage is significantly better with most monitored settlements (55 settlements with a total population of 127,600 residents) reporting arrival of the ambulance within one or two hours. In three settlements (total population of 363 residents) ambulances were not always able to respond to calls.

Overall focus group discussions with residents in settlements 5 to 20km from the contact line demonstrate the anxiety people feel due to the delay in the arrival of ambulances.

Access to Education / Recreational Facilities

The protection monitoring assessed communities' access to schools, kindergartens and playgrounds within walking distance. It is worth noting that only 13 per cent of the residents living in the 156 monitored settlements are children. In some locations, residents explain that all families with children left the village precisely due to conflict-related security issues, lack of transportation and poor communication networks.

Functional schools are accessible within walking distance or using a school bus in 110 settlements with children (out of a total of 128 settlements with a total population of 47,700 children). Approximately 600 children living in 13 isolated settlements along the contact line (81 per cent located in the 0 to 5km area) face challenges in accessing schools due to the distance and lack of public transportation. In such cases, residents explained

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	50	272,676
Limited	37	71,836
Moderate	34	14,933
Critical	32	1,215
Severe	3	71

that families try to organize a rotational scheme of transportation amongst themselves or proceed with long-distance education modalities where internet connection allows. One settlement highlighted that in the absence of places to play, children sometimes go to the riverbank, which is a major concern to their parents, as the area is contaminated with mines/ERWs.

Kindergartens are not available in 44 settlements with children. In 17 additional settlements, KIs reported that kindergartens are available in neighbouring settlements, but access requires families to find public transportation. Two of these settlements have more than 1000 residents.

Once again, the issue of public transportation and security are crosscutting and determinant of the population's access to education and recreational facilities.



Forced to flee the conflict in eastern Ukraine, 38-year-old mother, teacher and psychologist Olena Abayeva opened her own treatment centre, World of Happy Children, for internally displaced special needs children in Sumy, north-east Ukraine, 2018 @UNHCR

Utilities

Although most of the monitored settlements have regular access to basic utilities, 91 communities with 176,300 residents continue to experience some level of limitations. At least 34 settlements experience regular cuts and limited access to alternative sources of water and electricity, including 29 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area.

In four of the nine settlements where community consultations were conducted, participants explained that between 2015 and 2016 electricity was completely cut off. In 2021, power outages were reported in at least 56 settlements (66 per cent in the 0 to 5km area). In some locations, residents are reportedly required to refrain from using electricity or turning any light on during the night, due to the presence of military in the community and proximity to the contact line. For example, in 2015, the electricity supply system in Opytne (Donetsk Oblast) was damaged by shelling. Due to persistent insecurity in the area, lack of a ceasefire and a lack of resources from the local administration to repair it, residents had no access to electricity for more than 6 years. Out of the pre-war population of 800 persons, most residents left to seek safety elsewhere. In 2021, only 36 persons remain in settlement. In April 2021, electricity supply was finally restored in Opytne thanks to efforts of the Donetsk Oblast Civil-Military Administration, with international funding support.

Communities affected by electricity cuts and located close to the contact line struggle to find alternative sources of energy for cooking and heating. In focus group discussions, residents reported that because of the conflict and landmine contamination, they are unable to collect firewood in nearby areas. The

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	65	184,457
Limited	57	150,814
Moderate	14	5,941
Critical	18	19,499
Severe	2	20

only alternative is to purchase coal in the vicinities, which is reported to be expensive and of low quality. In some locations, communities reported that the easiest point for purchasing coal would be in settlements located in the Non-Government Controlled Area, which are now inaccessible. Most of the communities reported relying almost entirely on humanitarian organizations to access sources of energy for heating during wintertime.

Access to water is reportedly difficult in 24 monitored settlements where 13,500 persons live (79 per cent of the settlements are in the 0 to 5km area). Amongst this group, at least 17 settlements report not being connected to the water distribution system, while the remaining seven report regular water cuts, including due to frequent shelling of water stations. In focus group discussions, communities explained that prior to the conflict they had regular access as the water supply was centralized and distributed to all communities. Since 2015, however, water companies that remained in the Non-Government Controlled Area stopped supplying water in some regions and residents now have to purchase water or rely on wells. Nonetheless, the water from wells is not suitable for drinking and in some instances wells are not accessible due to their location or poor road conditions. Moreover, wells can be dry in certain periods and electricity cuts prevent water pumps from working.



A grandmother stokes a stove with coal donated by the UNHCR in the village of Zolote 3, Luhanska oblast © UNHCR/Anastasia Vlasova

Difficulties in access to water have additional implications. In some locations, residents reported in community consultations that their families relied on family gardens to have access to vegetables for their own consumption. In this regard, lack of access to water to irrigate their small family production was reported as a constraint for their livelihoods and subsistence. In places where wildfires were reported, lack of access to water was mentioned as a reason for an ineffective or delayed

response by the State Emergency Services.

Local authorities and KIs in at least 37 settlements (92 per cent in the 0 to 5km area) reported that windows of silence (ceasefires) are required anytime supply systems are shelled and/or require repairs or maintenance. Nonetheless, communities reported that in some instances it is not possible to repair water or electricity systems because documents related to property ownership remained on the Non-Government Controlled Area and there is no consensus on who is responsible for the repairs.

Finally, in 18 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area, KIs raised concerns on illegal landfills and the lack of predictable and regular garbage collection and removal, which results in poor sanitation and health concerns as well.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The identification of protection risks related to Gender-based Violence (GBV) are based on KI's knowledge of incidents in the monitoring period and on their perceptions of special concerns related to the safety of women and girls. It is important to note that results are not based on the identification of concrete individual cases, and the information on whether these are conflict related GBV incidents is limited. The monitors asked KIs if they had heard of any cases of GBV in the four weeks preceding the interview. The recorded answer can be "yes", "no", or "don't know". In addition, monitors asked key informants if there were any particular concerns in their community regarding the safety of women and girls. In the event of a positive response, the KI was asked to specify the types of safety concerns.

Therefore, results should be read with caution in light of the limitations of the monitoring of GBV, and it would be wrong to conclude that persons are exposed to GBV only in settlements where KIs reported this problem. Gender-based issues are generally underreported, especially due to fear of stigma or threats, or even the lack of awareness among people consulted. The objective of the inclusion of GBV-related questions in the protection monitoring was to give community members the opportunity

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	116	106,325
Limited	22	105,010
Moderate	9	87,967
Critical	8	61,090
Severe	1	339

to alert relevant actors about situations they deem serious. However, many situations of GBV were not reported, while situations reported to monitors were not necessarily those with most severe levels of prevalence.



Focus group discussion in Verkhnotoretske, Luhansk oblast. © UNHCR

Between February and May 2021, at least one informant in 26 settlements (where over 175,000 persons live) responded positively to the first question on whether they are aware of GBV incidents and/or to the second on particular safety concerns for women and girls. Of the 26 settlements where GBV concerns were mentioned, there were 12 settlements in which KIs provided positive answers to both questions. In terms of geographical locations of the 26 settlements in which GBV concerns were identified, there are 14 settlements in Donetsk oblast (with a total of over of 130,000 inhabitants) and 12 settlements in Luhansk Oblast (with a total of nearly 45,000 inhabitants).

During focus group discussions, communities confirmed their concern regarding GBV issues and explained the critical impact of a number of factors on the security of women and girls, as described below.

Lack of street lighting was highlighted as a contributing factor to insecurity for women and girls, including in settlements where the lighting system is in place but does not cover certain streets. The main reported reasons for lack of street lighting were proximity of the settlements to the contact line and lack of budgetary resources from local authorities.

Finally, communities reported that women and girls are particularly affected by the presence of stray dogs (which show aggressive behaviour) and by the fear of meeting people under the influence of alcohol or drugs (reported specifically in two settlements in Donetsk oblast and in four settlements in Luhansk oblast).

Essential services for survivors of gender-based violence are not equally accessible everywhere. In one of the settlements of 1,300 inhabitants located immediately on the contact line, and where both concerns on GBV and insecurity for women and girls were signalled (Trokhizhenka), members of the community underlined several gaps: the absence of police, slowness of ambulance services to reach the village, the absence of social workers (who have not been paid since January 2021, in the wake of the decentralization reform) and the discontinuation of day care services at the nearest hospital. In this settlement, the women consulted also explicitly underlined the lack of information on useful contacts for the protection of children and cases of domestic violence.

Non-conflict related security issues

In addition to security concerns directly related to the active hostilities (shelling, mines, damages, etc.), the protection monitoring also identified other security concerns of the population living close to the contact line, notably related to the inavailability of street lighting, presence of stray dogs and wild animals, as well as the response of State Emergency Services (SES) and police in case of emergency or security incident. Of the 25 settlements reporting a severe or critical level of non-conflict related security concerns, most (17) are located in the 0 to 5km area.

In 105 (67 per cent) monitored settlements, where 68,400 persons live, street lighting is completely unavailable. Out of 98 settlements located in the 0 to 5km area, 69 settlements report not having street lighting (where 51,800 persons live). The reason for this is not necessarily lack of equipment, as streetlamps

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	9	151,365
Limited	56	131,321
Moderate	66	72,788
Severe	23	5,197
Critical	2	60

are installed in most settlements, but due to the presence of military and proximity to the contact line. Participants in all focus group discussions raised the issue of “informal curfews” or self-restraining behaviour being applied, as they are required to stay home with all lights off to avoid being victims of direct fire or shelling. As mentioned in the previous section, lack of street lighting is perceived by communities as an additional source of threat to women and girls. Older people, persons with disabilities and their caregivers are considered by their communities as the population groups most exposed to non-conflict related security issues.

The coverage of the State Emergency Services (SES)⁸ is reportedly more challenging in settlements located closer to the contact line, and particularly

⁸ State Emergency Services is the institution responsible for extinguishing fires and for the disposal of UXOs/ERW, for instance.

“My neighbour is very old and was having a health emergency. The ambulance did not arrive because the road was muddy. So I ran to his house to rescue him, stumbling on my way as I could not see where I was going – and could not even light a lantern”

Participant in focus group discussion in Myronivka (Donetsk Oblast)

during wintertime when road conditions are poor. Of the total settlements, only the ones located in the 0 to 5km area reported that SES does not always arrive or is not able to systematically respond to residents' calls due to the security situation. While, in February, 25 settlements (all located in the 0 to 5km area) reported that SES did not arrive when asked to respond, the situation improved in the months of March and April after the dry season started. By the end of April, only 8 settlements reported that SES had issues with access, which can be attributed to the improvement of the weather and road accessibility. On the other hand, the persistence of limitations to SES' access is also a result of the ongoing conflict-related security situation (particularly the risk of shelling).

Although most of the settlements reported a good level of response by the police, gaps were still identified in smaller settlements. At least six settlements (with a total population of 65 residents, all located in the 0 to 5km area) reported that the police never arrive, while an additional 16 settlements (where 2,800 persons live) mentioned that the police do not always arrive. The reasons for that are the same as for the SES – conflict-related security risks and poor road conditions.

Finally, stray dogs are reported as both a public health and a security concern in 23 settlements where 63,000 people live. Communities explained that the animals were either left behind by residents who left the settlement as a result of the conflict or by the military. In the absence of a State response to vaccinate, sterilize or capture stray dogs, some of them become aggressive and pose a threat to residents (children, in particular), poultry and their own domestic animals. In the 0 to 5km area, out of 20 settlements that reported concerns with this issue, 11 settlements reported the occurrence of previous attacks of stray dogs against residents.



This precious puppy named Babay was lucky to stay with his owner forced to flee conflict zone in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, hundreds of dogs have become stray after the eruption of the conflict, 2015. © UNHCR/Bogdan Kinashchuk

Freedom of Movement

The protection monitoring assessed the limitations to freedom of movement due to the establishment of checkpoints (at the entrance or within communities) in the context of the armed conflict. KIs reported that some level of limitation is established in at least 65 settlements, where 123,300 persons live. Within this group, access to 37 settlements is only possible through a checkpoint. In the remaining settlements, KIs report that limitations vary and include occasional document checks, checkpoints within the settlements and total access ban in “no-go zones”. In April, following the increase of hostilities and ceasefire violations, KIs reported the introduction of additional limitations on the movement of civilians in at least two settlements in Donetsk.

Severity Scale	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents
None/minimal protection concerns	91	237,503
Limited	19	53,709
Moderate	15	52,860
Severe	22	7,684
Critical	9	8,975

Medical Services, which do not go further than the entrance of checkpoints), access to livelihoods and availability of public transportation. In addition, communities added that limitations to freedom of movement also causes family separation (in some settlements non-residents are not allowed to enter), increases feelings of insecurity and impacts their overall psychosocial wellbeing. Limitations on freedom of movement are reportedly not only related to checkpoints, but also to the presence of landmines.

It is worth noting that in community consultations, whenever asked about the impact of presence of checkpoints or other restrictions in their daily lives, participants highlighted that the main source of concerns in terms of freedom of movement was actually the establishment of a contact line separating the territory of Ukraine and its corresponding restrictions for crossings at Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECPs). Families, properties and community support mechanisms are present on both sides of the contact line – therefore, the current restrictions affect the populations’ coping mechanisms, welfare and resilience as well.

“We feel insecure, lack stability. Parts of the village are closed, the seashores are mined and closed. In checkpoints they can stop you and check your bags, receipts from markets”
Participant in the focus

group discussion in Berdianske (Donetsk)

During community consultations, residents of monitored settlements explained that the presence of checkpoints, or other measures limiting their ability to move freely and access all areas of their communities, have consequences in terms of State services’ access to the settlements (such as Emergency



Residents in eastern Ukraine cross the border checkpoint between the government-controlled area and non-government controlled area in Mayorsk, Donetsk oblast, 2018. © UNHCR/Anastasia Vlasova

Main Conclusions

Below is a summary of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the protection monitoring:

- The volatility of the security situation caused by the ongoing hostilities and extensive land contamination by mines/ERW, coupled with the isolation of the monitored communities from national institutions and markets due to the lack of transportation and communications, are the main crosscutting issues affecting the population living in the settlements close to the contact line. Although to varying degrees, both elements impact the population's freedom of movement, livelihoods, access to social and administrative services, healthcare, education, and the overall situation of utilities available in these settlements along the contact line.
- The Government of Ukraine has taken laudable steps to enhance service provision at the local level and to bring the authorities closer to communities, including by expanding digital services that can be accessed remotely. The continued empowerment of TCs through the decentralization reforms is a welcome development and an opportunity to strengthen communities' resilience, foster local development and build social cohesion amongst the conflict-affected population. Completion of the decentralization reform, particularly in TCs along the contact line, is expected to enable sound functionality of new local governance structures.
- While the process of decentralization is unfolding and remains to be completed, the transition has caused disruptions in the provision of and access to essential protection services in locations where individuals with specific vulnerabilities rely on social services, which were already difficult to access. Nonetheless, by the time the Protection Monitoring report is being released, it is possible to notice positive trends. All heads of Civil Military Administrations have been appointed, bringing more clarity in leadership at local level and providing local authorities with the ability to initiate the process of establishing all expected social and administrative services. New TSNAPs and Centres for the Provision of Social Services, including in mobile modalities, are gradually being established and expanded in the monitored territorial communities.
- In terms of impact, settlements located 0 to 5km from the contact line are disproportionately affected in comparison to settlements located further away from this area. Under all thematic indexes, communities located in the 0 to 5km area reached higher levels of severity, affecting a larger number of communities in comparison to the ones located more than 5km from the contact line.
- The analysis of the average index shows that the levels of impact and risks on communities located along the contact line are more critical or severe in relation to the level and quality of *Access to Social and Administrative Services; Livelihoods and Commercial Services; Healthcare; Security (conflict and non-conflict related) and Transportation and Communications*. In focus group discussions, communities also added Access to Healthcare as a priority concern.



UNHCR NGO partner "Proliska" is helping to construct an outdoor terrace where local community of 105 people could hold community meetings and sessions with representatives of the NGO sector. Travneve village, Donetsk oblast, 2021 @UNHCR

Recommendations

Below is a summary of the main recommendations based on the findings from the protection monitoring:

- Support a smooth transition of humanitarian services to national or local authorities in charge, or entities to which they may decide to outsource:** Recognising the accountability and capacity of the Government of Ukraine at all levels, the humanitarian community is encouraged to support local, regional and national authorities in developing the social protection system in the Government-controlled areas, to foster sustainable solutions and enable a substantial reduction in pure humanitarian interventions and the implementation of the Humanitarian-Development nexus over the next few years.
- Ensure the effective participation of communities in the response to their protection concerns:** Engaging with communities to discuss their concerns, and design solutions based on their input is essential to ensure the sustainability and appropriateness of any programme implemented on their behalf. This engagement can even lead to a mobilisation of community members in the implementation of the humanitarian response and development projects. Irrespective of the current local governance regime of territorial communities along the contact line, the decentralisation reform gives a good opportunity to reorganise public services and plan public investments through a participatory approach which also includes isolated communities. Ensuring the presence of starostas would also contribute to giving a voice to communities in settlements along the contact line.
- Ensure effective access of isolated communities to public services:** When organising services in line with their new responsibility under the decentralisation reform, it is important that TCs ensure that their administrative and social services remain effectively accessible to isolated communities along the contact line, either through adequate public transportation connection or mobile services.
- Support access to public transportation for isolated communities:** Establishing alternatives for public and affordable transportation would have a positive and meaningful impact on the lives of people living along the contact line. In the absence of reliable communication networks, lack of presence of social institutions, banks, ATMs, post offices and mobile services in most of the settlements along the contact line, public transportation is fundamental to bridge the gap between conflict-affected communities, job opportunities and State institutions. It is important to discuss routes and schedules of transportation services with the communities, adjusting services as much as possible to their needs and profiles, including in regard to access to jobs.
- Continue the support to mobile services:** Since mobility is a key issue for affected communities, particularly the ones located in the 0 to 5km area, it is important to continue strengthening mobile administrative and social services, as well as to support the continuance of activities of mobile post offices and ATMs. Communities would also benefit from more outreach from free legal aid providers (FLACs or NGOs), having their services more accessible and regularly deployed in isolated communities along the contact line.
- Ensure effective connection to online services:** The Government of Ukraine has made significant progress to expand digitalization and remote access to services through mobile apps. While these efforts are ongoing, negotiations with mobile and internet service providers would be much valuable to extend and improve their coverage in isolated communities. Improving the level of access of residents along the contact line to these services is essential, while on-line access to administrative services is being rolled out. Support to courses to strengthen the e-literacy in isolated communities would also be relevant, while targeted support adapted to persons with specific needs (elderly, persons with disabilities) remains important to ensure effective inclusion.
- Ensure investments in essential physical infrastructures in conflict affected communities:** Improvements on water and sanitation, communications and road infrastructure are needed to link conflict-affected communities to the main service centres.
- Facilitate dialogues on safety and peaceful coexistence between civilian communities living and security forces deployed along the contact line:** Strengthening mechanisms to allow dialogue amongst communities and local authorities, including military officers, would allow residents to present and discuss their main concerns, priorities and proposed solutions.

- Reinforce information on GBV services:** Information on availability of specialized protection services and referral mechanisms and reporting systems, particularly for GBV survivors, should be further disseminated to communities living in isolated settlements.
- Address safety concerns caused by stray dogs:** The issue of stray dogs is an important concern to the safety of residents in monitored communities. Launching programmes for sterilisation and vaccination and, where relevant, limiting stray dog feeding, could potentially improve the situation.
- Ensure street lighting wherever possible:** Reassessing limitations to street lighting imposed for security reasons and restoring street lighting where these restrictions do not appear essential (including through the installation of equipment that consumes less electricity, like battery/solar panels) could positively impact the feeling of security and reduce associated risks in communities.
- Enhance capacity for a rapid delivery of civilian protection services:** Given that settlements further away from the contact line are less impacted by the ongoing hostilities and are more accessible, more efforts are needed to bring the response time closer to the approved standard for emergency medical response teams. Improving the existing emergency preparedness plans for emergency could enhance the response to critical situations and disasters in isolated areas, in particular with regard to the evacuation for medical reasons and response to wildfires.



UNHCR delivers construction materials to provide shelter assistance in the settlements along the contact line in Luhanska oblast, 2021 @UNHCR




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