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Co-operation in Europe
Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

THEMATIC REPORT

CHECKPOINTS ALONG THE CONTACT LINE:
REASONS WHY CIVILIANS CROSS AND THE
CHALLENGES THEY FACE

January 2018 — October 2019

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SUMMARY

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine monitors conflict-affected areas and reports on the hardships faced by civilians who regularly travel across the contact line through five operational entry-exit checkpoints (EECPs) in government-controlled areas and corresponding checkpoints in non-government-controlled areas. These EECPs and corresponding checkpoints are used by tens of thousands of civilians every day to access pensions, education, healthcare and other basic social services and benefits, visit family, check on property, and buy food and non-food items. EECPs and corresponding checkpoints process vehicular and pedestrian traffic in both directions, with the exception of the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska, which can only be used as a pedestrian crossing.

This report covers the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 October 2019 and presents the SMM's monitoring observations related to the reasons why civilians travel across the contact line, the security risks and other challenges they face when doing so and recent efforts undertaken to improve conditions for civilian crossing.

Civilians are exposed to a number of challenges while crossing the contact line, including safety risks posed by mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and ceasefire violations. In the reporting period, the SMM recorded nearly 22,000 ceasefire violations within 5km of the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. It also confirmed ten civilian casualties in their vicinity of which three were fatalities.

Interlocutors voiced concerns about long queues and waiting times along the journey and the limited processing capacity at checkpoints. Extreme weather conditions bring additional hardship to civilians, particularly for the elderly, who need to cross the contact line to collect their pensions in government-controlled areas. Since the beginning of 2018, 40 civilians, mostly elderly, have died due to natural causes, such as strokes and heart attacks, while waiting to cross the contact line. Their exposure to arduous conditions is exacerbated by the lack of adequate infrastructure and basic services at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, such as medical care, especially in the area between the forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations, where ambulance services and medical personnel are currently reluctant to enter or are prevented access.

Despite the difficult journey, according to the Ukrainian State Border Guards Service (SBGS), the number of crossings has been increasing every year from 8.5 million in 2016 to 13.5 million in 2018, a trend that has continued in 2019.¹ The Mission has noted efforts undertaken to improve conditions at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints since summer and autumn 2018, including the reconstruction and improvement of infrastructure aimed at processing civilians faster.

¹ According to data from the Ukrainian SBGS: Number of crossings across all five EECPs: 8.56 million (2016); 11.84 million (2017); 13.62 million (2018); and, 10.58 million (1 January — 30 September 2019).

Of particular note is the recent repair work and opening of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge which has been enabled following the recent disengagement in the disengagement area near Stanytsia Luhanska. Additionally, Ukrainian authorities have repaired the road that leads from the EECP until the bridge and introduced a shuttle bus taking people to the bridge, thus easing conditions for civilians' crossing of the contact line, particularly alleviating the suffering of elderly people. There remains, however, an acute need for more crossing points, especially in Luhansk region, and further measures to address the complex crossing procedures so that people can travel smoothly and safely.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The SMM was established on 21 March 2014 by the OSCE Permanent Council's Decision No.1117 and is mandated, among other tasks, to establish and report facts in response to specific incidents and monitor and support respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.² In line with its mandate and with the overall aim to reduce tensions and foster peace, stability and security in Ukraine, the SMM monitors and reports on the human rights situation of civilians crossing the nearly 500km contact line, which separates government- and non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

The report outlines the process of crossing EECPs and corresponding checkpoints as well as the main reasons why civilians are crossing the contact line. It also presents the main challenges they face in making this journey. Moreover, it highlights the recent efforts undertaken to improve the infrastructure in these locations, with particular attention given to the developments that have taken place at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP since June 2019. The findings in this report are based on monitoring by the SMM through direct observations, technical monitoring means such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and interviews with civilians crossing the contact line.

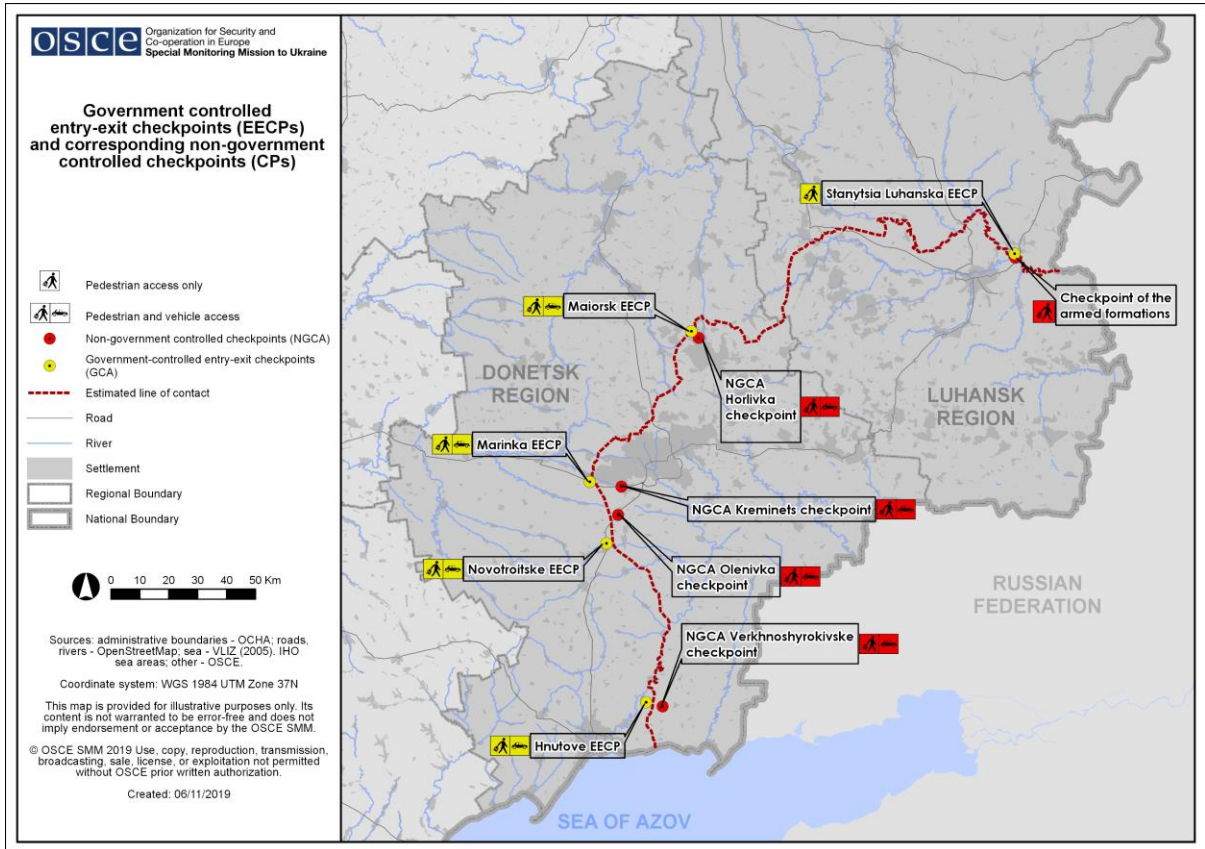
² OSCE, [Permanent Council, Decision No. 1117](#), Deployment of an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), PC.DEC/1117, March 2014.

CHAPTER 1: EECPS AND CORRESPONDING CHECKPOINTS

Background information

On 11 January 2015, Ukrainian authorities introduced a temporary order to regulate entry into and exit from government-controlled areas. As a result of this regulation, five EECPs were created: four in Donetsk region and one in Luhansk region (see map below).³ Each crossing point is composed of an EECP, which corresponds to a checkpoint in non-government-controlled areas, hereafter referred to as a corresponding checkpoint. The four EECPs in Donetsk region are equipped to

process both vehicular and pedestrian traffic in both directions, while the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska, the only EECP in Luhansk region, allows only pedestrian crossing. (For recent developments, see below Chapter 5.) The closest vehicular EECP that civilians from Luhansk region can access is located in Maiorsk (Donetsk region), which is more than a 130km drive from Luhansk city. On average over 37,500 pedestrians and 4,500 vehicles cross the contact line via the EECPs every day (see table below).



³ The Temporary Order on Control of the Movement of People, Transport Vehicles and Cargo along the Contact Line in Donetsk and Luhansk came into effect on 21 January 2015. It initially envisaged seven EECPs for civilians to cross the contact line (only five of which have been established): 1-Luhansk – Shchastia – Novovaidar; 2- Luhansk –Stanytsia Luhanska – Shyroky; 3- Fashivka – Debaltseve – Artemivsk; 4- Horlivka – Artemivsk; 5- Donetsk – Kurakhove; 6- Donetsk – Mariupol (through Volnovakha); 7- Novoazovsk – Krasnoarmiisk – Talakivka – Mariupol, <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2015/01/11/vizd-ta-viizd-iz-zoni-ato-zdiisnyuetsya-cherez-sim-transportnih-koridoriv-zaspezialnimi-perepustkami-/>

| EECP | Pedestrian crossings, daily average | Total pedestrian crossings | Vehicle crossings, daily average | Total vehicle crossings |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Stanytsia Luhanska EECP | 9,351 | 6,255,681 | n/a | n/a |
| Maiorsk EECP | 8,716 | 5,831,223 | 981 | 656,443 |
| Marinka EECP | 8,513 | 5,695,221 | 1,476 | 987,533 |
| Hnutove | 3,967 | 2,654,055 | 859 | 574,959 |
| Novotroitske EECP | 7,144 | 4,779,561 | 1,261 | 843,927 |
| Total crossings | 37,692 | 25,215,741 | 4,578 | 3,062,862 |

Figure 1 Crossing via the EECPs 1 January 2018 to 31 October 2019

(source: Ukrainian State Border Service)

Procedure for crossing EECPs and corresponding checkpoints

According to Temporary Order № 222-or,⁴ from 14 April 2017, people above the age of 16 need a valid passport and electronic permit (e-permit) to enter government-controlled areas through EECPs.⁵ Since 28 March 2019, e-permits no longer have expiry dates but unlimited validity (e-permits were previously issued on an annual basis).⁶ Minors (under the age of 16), who do not need their own e-permit, but are instead included on that of an adult traveling with them. They can cross the contact line with a passport or birth certificate together with a parent holding a power of attorney from the second parent and a valid e-permit.⁷ At the checkpoints of the armed formations, Ukrainian citizens have to present identification documents such as Ukrainian passports or “LPR/DPR passports”.

It should be noted that persons with special needs are entitled to priority treatment at the EECPs.⁸ In non-government-controlled areas, notices posted at the corresponding checkpoints indicate that some vulnerable groups, such as persons with certain medical conditions, have access to priority lines.

As for the transportation of goods across the contact line, Ukrainian legislation currently specifies a list of goods that can be taken to and from government-controlled areas, with a maximum of 75kg per person per day, up to the value of 10,000 Ukrainian Hryvna (UAH) (about 370 euros).⁹ In non-government-controlled areas, there are posters informing civilians that they can cross the checkpoints of the armed formations with a maximum of 50kg of goods up to a value of 200 euros per day.

⁴ Security Service of Ukraine Temporary Order No.222-OR “On the Movement of Persons through Line of Contact in Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”.

⁵ All civilians can apply for an electronic permit (e-permit) on the website of the Security Service of Ukraine.

⁶ Over the reporting period, the Ukrainian Government has taken legal steps to further facilitate travel across the contact line, notably with the removal of expiry dates of electronic permits to cross EECPs as of 28 March 2019. <https://urp.ssu.gov.ua/>

⁷ Security Service of Ukraine Temporary Order No.222 “On the Movement of Persons through Line of Contact in Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”.

⁸ According to the Security Service of Ukraine Temporary Order (Para. 3.4.), this group includes persons with special needs who have applied for inclusion in one of two different groups of disabilities, depending on the seriousness of their need (disability of groups 1 and 2), the elderly (over 70 years old), women with signs of pregnancy, parents (guardians, in the presence of supporting documents) with young children under three years of age, and other persons - in case of emergencies of a humanitarian nature (severe illness, funerals, transportation of the deceased, etc.).

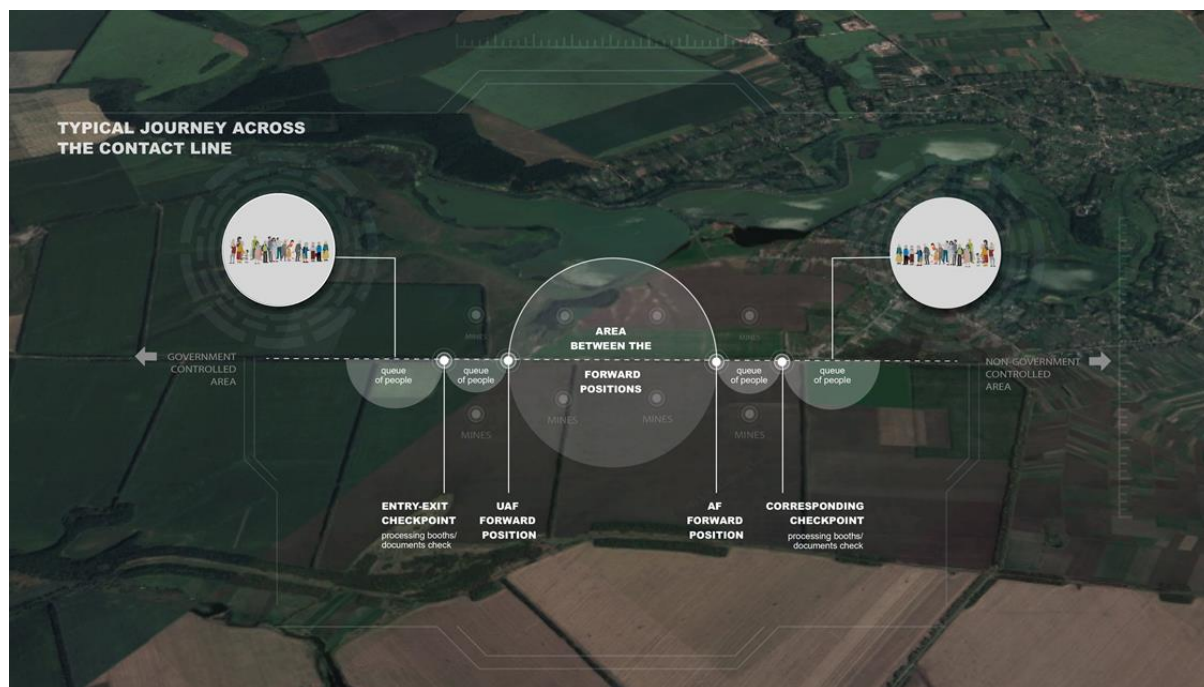
⁹ Regulations on transportation of goods are currently regulated by the “Procedure for transportation of goods to the area or from the area of conducting anti-terrorist operation” (Resolution No.99 adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on 1 March 2017). The Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons Order № 39 «On Approval of the List and Volumes of Goods Allowed for Movement to/from Humanitarian and Logistics Centres and Across the Line of Contact» of 24 March 2017, includes the list of allowed goods. On 2 November 2018, a Ukrainian Joint Forces Operation order restricted the number of times individuals could carry goods across the contact line to only once per day.

On 17 July 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a new Order outlining provisions for crossing the contact line.¹⁰ It amends the current procedures of entering and exiting government-controlled areas and will replace Temporary Order № 222 of April 2017. Among other provisions, the new Order facilitates the crossing of civilians into government-controlled areas, especially in the absence of valid Ukrainian documents, provides more detailed information on procedures and documents required for minors under 14 years old and envisages the development of a list of prohibited goods to replace the list of permitted goods that can be transported across the contact line. The Order was scheduled to enter into force on 29 October 2019; however, provisions of the Order are currently under review.

When crossing the contact line, civilians have to walk or drive through a series of checkpoints. For example, people travelling

from government- to non-government-controlled areas first have to pass the EECP for document control. They then proceed to the last checkpoint of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which is also their most forward position, before they walk or drive through a corridor not controlled by either side, located between the forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and that of the armed formations. The next checkpoint that civilians will reach is the checkpoint of the armed formations at the other end, which is also their forward position, and from there they will continue to the final checkpoint of the armed formations where their documents are again checked before they enter non-government-controlled areas.

The length of the aforesaid corridor varies. For example, between the Mairorsk EECP and the non-government-controlled Horlivka checkpoint the area is 1.1km compared with 2.9km between the Marinka EECP and



¹⁰ See the new order on entry of persons, movement of goods to temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions and departure of persons, movement of goods from such territories at <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/ua/hpas/pro-zatverdzhennya-poryadku-vyizd-815>.

the non-government-controlled Kreminets checkpoint.¹¹ At all four EECPs in Donetsk region, commercial bus services assist civilians in crossing parts of the corridor. However, buses only travel up to the forward position of either side and therefore civilians have to change bus to complete their journey. At the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, two shuttle buses organized by the Ukrainian authorities and two golf carts provided by United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), which recently started operating, are taking those crossing from the EECP to the bridge on the government-controlled side and back – easing the 1.4km journey made by thousands of people crossing every day. On average, crossing the contact line takes between two to five hours; however civilians have also told the SMM that the journey can take up to 35 hours.

¹¹ The approximate distance between the entry-exit checkpoint and armed formations checkpoint is 1.4km at Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, 3.5km at Maiorsk EECP, 11km at Marinka EECP, 10.5km at Novotroitske EECP, and 4.5km at Hnutove EECP. In Donetsk region, the approximate distance of the area between the forward positions is approximately 1.1km at Maiorsk EECP, 2.7km at Marinka EECP, 2.4km at Novotroitske EECP, and 1km at Hnutove EECP.

CHAPTER 2: REASONS FOR CROSSING THE CONTACT LINE

Civilians cross the contact line in both directions for a variety of reasons. For example, large numbers of elderly civilians, the majority of whom are women, from non-government-controlled areas travel to government-controlled areas to collect their pensions. Other reasons civilians cross include the need to access other social benefits, civil documentation as well as services such as healthcare and education, that are unavailable or limited in non-government-controlled areas. Civilians also cross for employment opportunities and to visit friends and family. The Mission noted that there are comparatively fewer residents from government-controlled areas who travel to non-government-controlled areas; their reasons for crossing include visiting families or property which they left behind in non-government-controlled areas.

Access to pensions and other social benefits

In order for people living in non-government-controlled areas to continue accessing social benefits, including pensions, they are required to register as internally displaced persons (IDP) in government-controlled areas.¹² To avoid the suspension of social benefits, people must undertake the journey to cross the contact line every 60 days.¹³

Between January and May 2019, the SMM met with more than 90 pensioners (men and women, 60–90 years old), including those with disabilities and mobility challenges,

at EECPs and in settlements in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions. They shared their concerns related to collecting their pensions; the time and cost of travel, security risks, and the tiresome registration process which entails waiting in queues for many hours, in harsh winter conditions or under the hot sun in summer. Most civilians register for their pensions in settlements near the contact line, for example in Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk region), Bakhmut, Kurakhove, Mariupol and Volnovakha (Donetsk region). However, in some instances, civilians had to register in areas much farther away in order to correspond to the locations where they are also registered as IDPs. For example, in February 2019, a 70-year-old woman from non-government-controlled areas in Donetsk region told the SMM that she had been travelling for the 18th time since 2015 to collect her pension in government-controlled Zaporizhzhia region via the Novotroitske EECP: she had to complete a trip of over 48 hours and about 460km. The journey had cost her nearly a quarter of the 2,800 UAH pension she receives.

While most pensioners told the SMM that they regularly undertake the difficult journey, more than 20 out of 90 pensioners said that limited mobility and challenges faced at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints forced them to stop crossing the contact line. About ten pensioners said that their pensions had been recently suspended, as they had not been able to travel to government-controlled areas within the required 60 days.

¹² While the collection of pensions is the main reason to cross the contact line, people also undertake this journey to receive other social benefits linked to one's place of residence registration. Social benefits include, for example, child assistance and social support for persons with disabilities as well as State Support for burials.

¹³ This is regulated by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 365 as of 8 June 2016 "Procedure for Assignment (Restoration) of Social Payments to Internally Displaced Persons". Crossing the contact line is also tracked by the "Arkan" system which records the movement of persons, vehicles and goods across the State border, as well as the contact line. If an IDP stays in non-government-controlled areas for more than 60 days, it can lead to the suspension of pensions and all social benefits.

According to reports from NGOs, the number of pensioners whose pensions have been suspended has increased since the "Arkan" system was introduced by the State Border Service of Ukraine in Spring 2018. The interagency "Arkan" system is also used by the Security Service of Ukraine, the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Fiscal Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

“Thank God I am back and don’t have to do that again for two months. I am an energetic person but I get so tired [doing this]. I am now dreaming of a hot shower and a change of clothes”

— Liubov, pensioner in her late 60s says after she reaches home on 15 March, two days after she started her journey of collecting her pension on 13 March 2019

Near the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, a 70 year-old woman told the SMM that she had lost her pension for eight months in 2018 because she was unable to travel to government-controlled areas due to poor health.

In September 2018, the Grand Chamber of the Supreme Court upheld the Supreme Court’s decision in May 2018 to restore pension payments in the individual case of an IDP pensioner. It also confirmed that a breach of IDP verification requirements stipulated by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 365 do not constitute lawful grounds for the suspension of pension payments and that the State is obliged to guarantee the right to a pension regardless of a person’s place of residence.¹⁴ This decision is a model for similar cases. However, there is no mechanism in place for paying accumulated arrears.¹⁵

Access to civil documentation and access to justice

Since the beginning of the conflict, civilians from non-government-controlled areas have been travelling to government-controlled areas in order to obtain Ukrainian documents such as civil registration documents, property-related documents, passports and IDP certificates. It is estimated that only 44 per cent of children reported to have been born in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions have obtained a birth certificate issued by the Government of Ukraine, putting the remaining 56 per cent at risk of statelessness.¹⁶ These children can be precluded from accessing a number of legal rights, such as acquiring a passport, establishing parenthood and guardianship rights, and accessing education, healthcare or child support services. The lack of death certificates has implications for inheritance rights and for establishing familial ties.¹⁷ Additionally, possessing Ukrainian Government issued documentation is also important for civilians wanting to sell, buy or inherit property.

Overall, obtaining Ukrainian birth and death certificates or other civil documents by residents in non-government-controlled areas is possible only through court procedures in government-controlled areas, often requiring crossing the contact line at least two times.¹⁸

¹⁴ Since June 2016, all pensioners with residence registration in non-government-controlled areas had to undergo verification procedures introduced by the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 365, which included mandatory inspections at IDPs’ place of residence every six months for appointment or restoration of pensions and social benefits. . On 4 July, Kyiv Court of Appeal ruled a decision according to which provisions on IDP inspections of Resolution No. 365 were declared unlawful.

¹⁵ Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 335 as of 8 June 2016 inserted on 25 April 2018 provide for developing a special order for payment pension arrears for IDPs.

¹⁶ According to a review of 2016-2018 court records, United Nations Briefing Note on Birth Registration, February 2019,

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/briefing_note_birth_registration_en.pdf.

¹⁷ “Birth and death registration for residents of non-government controlled areas of Eastern Ukraine”, Briefing note, Norwegian Refugee Council, June 2018, https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/ukraine/briefing-note_civil-registration.pdf

¹⁸ The Law No. 2268 (dated February 2016) “On specifics of the State policy on ensuring the State sovereignty of Ukraine in temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions” introduced a simplified procedure in the Criminal Procedure Code specifying that courts have to “immediately” examine an application for establishing the fact of birth or death when people from non-government-controlled areas address courts in government-controlled areas and documents from non-government-controlled areas establishing the facts of birth or death can be used to apply for certificate in government-controlled areas.

The actual time taken by the courts to consider the applications differs across regions and courts, ranging from a few hours to one day for birth and death certificates.¹⁹ Even though access to these documents is essential to ensure the freedom of movement of civilians, including for travelling abroad, and access to social services, thousands of people residing in non-government-controlled areas are still struggling to obtain valid documentation.

Access to healthcare

A number of settlements along both sides of the contact line have limited medical services and since the beginning of the conflict, have been separated by the contact line from towns where specialized medical services are provided. The SMM also noted that civilians from non-government-controlled areas travel to government-controlled areas in order to register for government programme which provides free medication. For example, in non-government-controlled Donetsk city in August 2019, a man told the SMM that he takes his child in remission from cancer to government-controlled areas for treatment through Novotroitske EECF. Travelling in the opposite direction, in July 2019, a woman from government-controlled Troitske told the Mission that she continues crossing the contact line to reach Donetsk city for cancer treatment she had started undergoing prior to the conflict. Additionally, a majority of interlocutors residing in non-government-controlled areas told the SMM that buying goods, particularly medicine, in government-controlled areas is one of the reasons for crossing the contact line, explaining that

medicine is cheaper in government-controlled areas, and that the selection is more varied.

“I live in Luhansk, but twice a year I need to visit Kharkiv because of my health condition. If I could, I would cross the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge EECF by myself as it is close to my home, but it is impossible. Because one of my legs was amputated, I cannot climb the broken part of the bridge. I can walk only a few steps at a time. Instead I have to travel via Kreminets. It is always very hard”

— 60-year-old man talks to the SMM at the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kreminets before the repair of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, March 2019

Access to education

As Ukrainian legislation does not recognize educational certificates issued in non-government-controlled areas, a number of students attend classes or take exams in government-controlled areas as part of distance learning or external studies programmes. Over the last four years, the number of children living in non-government-controlled areas enrolled in such programmes has increased — from 2,138 students in 2016 to 4,290 in 2019, of which about 80 per cent live in Donetsk region.²⁰ In 2019, the SMM visited 14 schools in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions offering distance learning programmes.

¹⁹ In February 2016, Article 257-1 was included in the Civil Procedure Code to enable people residing in non-government-controlled areas to address courts in government-controlled areas to establish the fact of birth or death via a simplified procedure, which specified that courts have to “immediately” examine an application for establishing the fact of birth or death.

²⁰ Information provided by the Ukraine Education Cluster in November 2019.

School children residing in non-government-controlled areas enrolled in the programmes generally have to cross the contact line at least once or twice a year for exams, or more frequently to visit teachers. In July 2019, a State administration employee in government-controlled Kramatorsk told the SMM that between February and March 2019, 687 students from non-government-controlled areas were registered to attend mid-term exams in Mariupol and Sloviansk, out of which 196 had to re-take the exam as they were unable to do it the first time due to the challenging journey across the contact line.

Visiting families

As the contact line has separated families and communities, people continue to undertake the journey through EECPs and corresponding checkpoints to maintain contact. While many people have been displaced, others remained due to reasons such as employment, lack of finances or the need to take care of family members with reduced mobility. In August 2019, the SMM met a man in government-controlled Avdiivka who has not seen his grandchildren, who live in Donetsk city, for years. He explained that before the conflict, it took him and his wife 15 minutes to reach Donetsk city but now they would have to travel through the Marinka EECP which would take them a whole day of travelling. In September 2019, at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, a 40-year-old female English teacher, who was returning to Luhansk city after visiting her mother-in-law in government-controlled areas, told the SMM that civilians hope that the bridge would be reconstructed soon so that they will be able visit family across the contact line more often.



Man and a boy crossing the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge EECP, August 2019

“I have not had a job since the conflict started, it has been a difficult time. I moved across the contact line to Vuhledar (government-controlled) to create a future for me and my mother. We still have family and friends in Donetsk city who we miss very much. We try to go visit them as much as we can, but the journey is very long and difficult!”

— Woman in her 30s in non-government-controlled Donetsk city in January 2019

Purchasing food and other items

Many civilians in non-government-controlled areas told the SMM that they cross the contact line to buy goods in government-controlled areas, particularly food and medicine as the prices are cheaper.

As an example, in June 2019, the SMM spoke with a 35-year-old man in Donetsk region who said he was trying to make some income by transporting and selling vegetables, fruits and berries grown by his family in government-controlled areas on markets in non-government-controlled areas. In August 2018, the SMM spoke with a 40-year-old woman at the Hnutove EECP who said she was travelling to government-controlled areas to buy school equipment for her three children because goods were generally less expensive.

CHAPTER 3: SECURITY CHALLENGES AT THE EECPS AND CORRESPONDING CHECKPOINTS

The numerous reasons for people to cross the contact line, as outlined in the section above, demonstrate the need for safe and unhindered access to both government- and non-government-controlled areas. However, ceasefire violations and the presence of mines and UXO at and around EECPs and corresponding checkpoints continue to expose civilians crossing the contact line to safety risks. During the reporting period, the SMM confirmed ten civilian casualties in the vicinity of EECPs and non-government-controlled checkpoints, three of which were fatalities.²¹ Seven of the casualties were due to small-arms fire and three were due to a mine.

Ceasefire violations

During the reporting period, the Mission has recorded nearly 22,000 ceasefire violations within 5km of the EECPs and non-government-controlled checkpoints, including over 10,000 during daytime. Seven out of the ten civilian casualties confirmed by the SMM were due to small-arms fire near these locations while they were waiting for a bus (six injured and one fatality). Three casualties occurred at the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Olenivka, three others in a single incident in the area between the Marinka EECP and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near Kreminets, and one casualty in the area between Hnutove EECP and the corresponding Verkhnoшыrokyvske checkpoint.

On eight instances, the SMM recorded damage to infrastructure at or near the EECPs and checkpoints of the armed formations. On 5 May 2018, the SMM heard and saw an explosion and fresh craters within the vehicle inspection area of the EECP in Pyshechyk, assessed as caused by the impacts of anti-tank guided missiles.²² In early December 2018, the SMM saw that pedestrians continued to descend and ascend the wooden ramp on the broken section of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, avoiding a fresh hole.²³ On 8 October 2018, a civilian car carrying a family of a man, woman and two children was hit by small-arms fire at the Marinka EECP.²⁴

On several occasions, the volatile security situation has led both sides to hastily close EECPs and corresponding checkpoints hindering the passage of thousands of civilians across the contact line.²⁵ For example, in July 2019, the SMM noted that the Maiorsk EECP had been temporarily closed for traffic on two occasions due to demining activities carried out by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.²⁶ The SMM has observed that all EECPs in government-controlled areas have underground shelters for people to take cover in case of shelling, however with a limited capacity (shelter can be provided for only about 30 people at a given time).²⁷

²¹ Civilian casualties: three fatalities (two men and one woman) and seven injuries (four men and three women).

²² See [SMM Daily Report 7 May 2018](#).

²³ See [SMM Daily Report 4 December 2018](#).

²⁴ See [SMM Daily Report 19 October 2018](#).

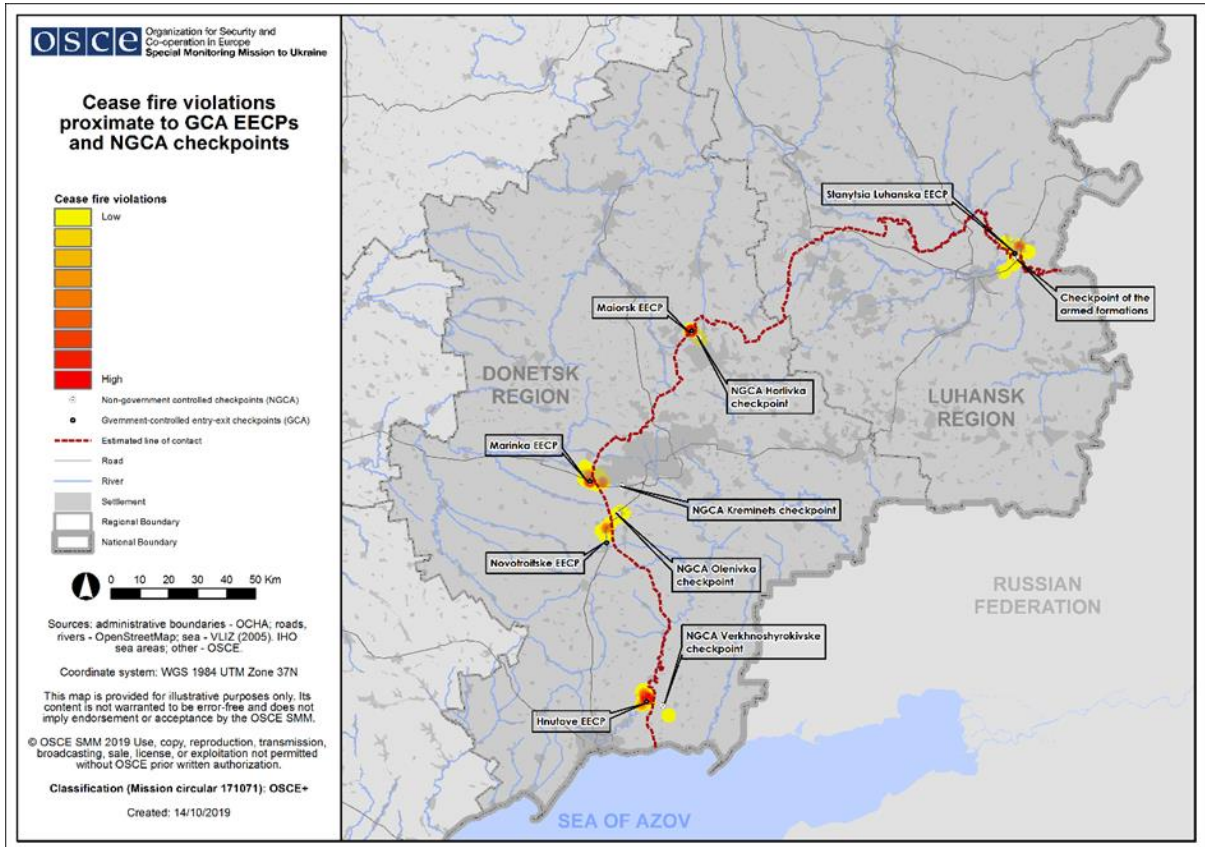
²⁵ On 6 April, the SMM observed that the EECP near Marinka was closed with no vehicles or pedestrians queuing. A Ukrainian Armed Forces representative to the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) and a senior member of the SBGS at the EECP told the SMM that it had remained closed since 5 April after two men (a SBGS officer and a Ukrainian Armed Forces soldier) had been injured by gunfire at the EECP on the same day. (See [SMM Daily Report 8 April 2019](#)).

²⁶ See [SMM Daily Report of 22 July 2019](#).

²⁷ Five bomb shelters at EECP Maiorsk, three at EECP Novotroitske, two at EECP Marinka, one at EECP Hnutove and one at EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska.

In non-government-controlled areas, such shelters are not available at the checkpoints near Olenivka and south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge. Despite the possibility to find safety in some areas, the Mission has observed that in the event of gunfire close

to the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, civilians are reluctant to take cover in the shelters or move away from the checkpoint, as they are scared of losing their place in the queue.²⁸



Mines and unexploded ordnance

Despite the commitment to remove all previously laid mines pursuant to Article 6 of the Memorandum of 19 September 2014 and the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG)'s Decision on Mine Action of 3 March 2016 which specifically details the marking, fencing off and mapping in the immediate vicinity of EECPs and along roads leading to these checkpoints, the SMM

continues to observe the presence of mines and UXO in these areas. While the SMM has seen mine awareness signs denoting mine fields or areas contaminated by mines and UXO around the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, more needs to be done to adequately demarcate contaminated areas, particularly between the forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations.

²⁸ On 25 January 2018, while passing the Mairorsk EECP, the SMM heard three shots of small-arms fire close to the EECP. The SMM saw 20 buses, more than 50 vehicles and around 400 people continuing to queue despite the heightened security situation.

All three civilian casualties attributed to mines and UXO in the vicinity of EECPs and corresponding checkpoints occurred in one incident. In February 2019, a man and a woman were killed and a man was injured when the mini-van they were travelling in detonated an explosive device near the checkpoint near non-government-controlled Olenivka. The SMM saw the burning wreckage of the overturned mini-van about 200m south of the forward positions of the armed formations near Olenivka. The injured man told the SMM that he had been returning to non-government-controlled areas with his mother and a driver after having received their pensions in government-controlled areas.

One month after this incident, the SMM saw eight unmarked anti-tank mines in a field north of a road used by thousands of civilians to reach the checkpoint of the armed formations near Olenivka.²⁹



Mine hazard sign near a non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kreminefs, January 2019

The lack of warning signs in the corridors between the most forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and those of the armed formations continues to pose a danger to civilians, which is further exacerbated

by the lack of available medical services in these corridors, making it difficult to rescue or provide medical care in the event of an incident. While the Mission has seen warning signs in government-controlled areas near EECPs, and to a lesser extent near non-government-controlled checkpoints, it noted the lack of awareness and knowledge about the risks of mines and UXO. For example, in July 2019, near the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, the SMM saw women leave the road and enter areas marked with mine hazard signs to use as makeshift toilet areas due to the temporary closure of a toilet facility.

Overnight stays near checkpoints and civilians caught in corridors between the most forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations

Due to the long queues and processing times, civilians are not always able to cross the contact line prior to the checkpoints closing. In these circumstances, civilians spend the night in the vicinity of EECPs and non-government-controlled checkpoints waiting for the next opening.³⁰ This situation exposes them further to potential shelling and small-arms fire incidents, which occur mostly during the night.³¹

On occasion, the Mission has followed up on reports of civilians becoming trapped in the corridor between the EECPs and the corresponding checkpoints, after the closure of the EECPs.

²⁹ See [SMM Daily Report 3 March 2019](#).

³⁰ The operating hours of the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints are 08:00 – 17:00 in winter time and 06:00–20:00 in summer time.

³¹ The SMM noted that infrastructure to accommodate them at checkpoints is relatively limited. At nighttime, heating stations are only available at the EECPs in Maiorsk, Hnutove, Novotroitske and Marinka and at the non-government-controlled checkpoint in Horlivka. At the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kreminefs, civilians have reported spending the night in their cars. At the non-government-controlled checkpoint in Olenivka and at the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska, civilians who are unable to cross on time use the possibility to rent rooms located in nearby villages.

On the evening of 6 December 2018, the SMM received reports that 17 cars with a total of 44 people, including two children, had remained in the area between the checkpoint of the armed formations in Horlivka and the EECP in Maiorsk after closing hours.³²

On 5 April 2019, the EECP in Marinka had been temporarily closed after a member of the SBGS and a Ukrainian Armed Forces soldier had been injured by gunfire.³³ In the afternoon of the same day, the Mission received phone calls from civilians who said there were still at least 70 cars waiting to enter government-controlled areas.³⁴ On both occasions, the SMM facilitated dialogue to enable people to continue their journey into government-controlled areas.

³² Following the SMM's facilitation, all people had been allowed entry into government-controlled areas.

³³ See [SMM Daily Report 8 April 2019](#).

³⁴ Following the SMM's facilitation, the hours of operation of the EECP in Novotroitske were extended to enable people who were not able to enter government-controlled areas through the EECP in Marinka to do so there. See [SMM Daily Report 7 December 2018](#).

CHAPTER 4: CHALLENGES FACED BY CIVILIANS CROSSING THE CONTACT LINE

The increasing number of people crossing and long waiting times make appropriate infrastructure, facilities and processing capacity at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints indispensable. Civilians have expressed their concerns about the lack of sheltered areas to protect them from the elements as they are queuing to be processed, a lack of benches and heating and cooling containers where they can rest, and the insufficient and often unhygienic sanitary facilities, particularly in non-government-controlled areas. Moreover, civilians face challenges when transporting goods across the contact line or have difficulties crossing checkpoints in the absence of valid documents.



Man waiting in his car on his way towards Marinka EECP

Long queues due to limited processing capacity

The SMM regularly observes long queues at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints

along the contact line and people often express their concern over the long waiting times. As noted above, many people are likely to spend a whole day travelling back and forth. In Donetsk region, civilians have often told the SMM that the queuing time at two non-government-controlled checkpoints exceeds that of the EECPs, whereas in Luhansk region, civilians note longer queues at the EECP as they wait to travel towards non-government-controlled areas. For example, on 9 June 2019, the SMM observed at least 200 cars waiting in line at a checkpoint of the armed formations near non-government-controlled Olenivka and was told by people in the queue that they had been waiting for more than ten hours while the outside temperature was above 30 degrees³⁵. In October 2019 at the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kremynets, a woman (aged 50-60 years old) told the SMM that she had spent 13 hours queuing to enter government-controlled areas before the checkpoint closed for the day. She said she would now have to travel back to Donetsk city to spend the night before returning to the checkpoint the next morning to join the queue again. Near the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska women, 60–70 years old) traveling to government-controlled areas to collect their pensions told the SMM they started queuing at 9 a.m knowing that it would take additional five hours to cross the checkpoints and about six hours to return to non-government-controlled areas.

³⁵ The Mission saw a member of the armed formations with a medical kit attending to an elderly man in a car in the queue.

The long queues are mainly due to limited processing capacity at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, including the low number of staff and lack of equipment to process travellers. The SMM noted that the five EECPs and corresponding checkpoints have different processing capacities, with more booths at EECPs compared with non-government-controlled checkpoints with the exception of Olenivka.³⁶



People queuing at Maiorsk EECP, January 2019

Although the Mission has observed an increasing number of booths installed at EECPs since the beginning of 2018, they are not always operating at full capacity. On several occasions during the summer of 2019, the SMM observed that despite the fact that more than one thousand people were queuing at the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska not all of the available processing booths were open. As detailed above, certain vulnerable groups are allowed access to priority lines at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints; however, this does not always work in practice. In July 2018, at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, the SMM spoke with an elderly couple (both about 70 years old), who expressed their frustration after they had been refused priority treatment

at the EECP while on their way to collect their pensions. They told the SMM that SBGS refused to accept the documentation from non-government-controlled areas confirming the man's disability (the SMM saw that his right arm was missing). Discouraged by the long queues, the couple decided to return to non-government-controlled areas without collecting their pensions. In October 2019, at the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kremynets, a 60-year-old man told the SMM that he arrived there at 8 a.m and had been queuing in the "priority line" for over three hours with his wife who had lost her leg in a shelling incident in 2014. He was anxious to reach her medical appointment in Kharkiv on time.

Insufficient infrastructure for harsh weather conditions

Extreme weather conditions bring additional hardship to civilians at checkpoints. In the winter, people are waiting in freezing temperatures and walk or drive on icy and slippery roads that are not adequately maintained. At all of the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, civilians can make use of heating stations to protect themselves from the cold. Heating stations are operated by international organizations at EECPs, while members of the emergency services of the armed formations ("MchS") run this service at all the non-government-controlled checkpoints in Donetsk region, with the exception of the checkpoint south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, where a heating shelter has been set up by an international organization.

³⁶ SMM observation from August 2019, the maximum number of booths in government-controlled areas compared to non-government-controlled areas: 40–8 at Stanytsia Luhanska; 24–9 at Maiorsk; 10–9 at Marinka; 10–24 Novotroitske and 6–4 Hnutove. However, the SMM has regularly observed that not all booths are operational at all times.

The SMM has also noted that over the reporting period other types of shelters provide a roof-cover structure to give some protection to people queuing at all EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. These shelters for people queuing at EECPs have a capacity for 300 to 400 people while the non-government-controlled checkpoints in Olenivka and Verkhnochyrovivske have a smaller capacity and can hold a maximum of 40 people.

Insufficient medical facilities

Some form of medical facilities have been established at all EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. Throughout the day, stationary medical facilities are operational in both government- and non-government-controlled areas where medical personnel are available to assist travellers, mainly for blood pressure, heart conditions, diabetes, and dehydration, but also in case of injuries. However, the SMM observed that the above-mentioned facilities are generally not sufficiently equipped or staffed to provide medical care in case of trauma or serious medical incidents. In emergencies, people need to be transferred directly to the nearest hospital. With the exception of the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge where an ambulance is available on the spot, ambulances need to be called on an as-needed basis. If available, it could take from five (Stanytsia Luhanska hospital to the EECP) to 30 minutes (Bakhmut hospital to Maiorsk EECP) for an ambulance to arrive on the scene. Humanitarian actors remain the main providers of medical assistance at the EECPs while the armed formations

provide such assistance at five checkpoints. In the beginning of 2019, a medical resuscitation centre at the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska was established by an international organization and equipped with emergency equipment, including a defibrillator, which could provide timely life-saving services. Of critical concern is the lack of medical services in the corridor between the EECPs and the corresponding checkpoints. There is no possibility for ambulances to enter these areas. In the event of physical injuries or medical emergencies in the aforementioned area, civilians have to make their own way or be transported by other travelers to the nearest checkpoint for medical assistance.

Difficult weather conditions and long queues at checkpoints are particularly challenging for the elderly. From January 2018 until 31 October 2019, the SMM recorded 40 cases of natural deaths while crossing the contact line, among which were 36 elderly persons over 60 years old.³⁷ The main causes of death are heart attacks, strokes and cardiac arrests. In April 2019, the SMM saw the body of an 82-year-old man who died at the EECP covered by a blanket behind the SBGS container at the Maiorsk EECP. His fellow travellers told the SMM that he had been travelling to collect his pension in government-controlled Bakhmut. In February 2019, the SMM followed up on reports of a 68-year-old man who had died while waiting alone in his car at the non-government-controlled checkpoint near Kremynets to cross into government-controlled areas.³⁸ The SMM has often witnessed or been informed about elderly people falling down and getting hurt after hurrying to get into the processing line.

³⁷ Thirty-five of the 40 civilians who died of natural causes at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints were men and five were women.

³⁸ See [SMM Daily Report 14 February 2019](#).

Transportation of goods across the contact line

At the pedestrian EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska, the carriage of goods across the contact line remains particularly difficult in the absence of vehicular traffic. At other vehicular EECPs, the SMM noted a frequent movement of goods from government- to non-government-controlled areas, including via trucks. However, restrictions on the amount and type of goods that can be brought across the contact line places significant burden and limitations on individuals since items not on the list can be taken away from people at EECPs.³⁹ In June 2019, a woman in her fifties told the SMM that she was prohibited from bringing flower pots into non-government-controlled areas; the reason given by SBGS at the EECP was that the pots were not included under the list of gardening equipment or tools introduced by resolution №39.⁴⁰

“Why can’t we just bring the things we need so that we can live normal lives? We are Ukrainians too!”

— 50-year-old man at the armed formations checkpoint near Horlivka, August 2019



Civilians carrying their belongings at the UAF forward positions close to Marinka EECP, July 2018.



Stanytsia Luhanska broken section of the bridge before the repair, April 2019.

³⁹ See above Chapter 1. 2. Procedure for crossing EECPs and corresponding checkpoints.

⁴⁰ See resolution №39, footnote 9.

Documentation challenges for civilians crossing the contact line

Another challenge that civilians face is the lack of valid documentation to cross EECPs. The Mission has noted cases when single parents leaving non-government-controlled areas with children were able to enter government-controlled areas, but unable to return home in the absence of a notarized parental permission from the other parent or a valid death or missing person certificate. It can take up to several days to obtain valid documents from Ukrainian authorities, often at a high cost (via notaries) for single parents, most of whom are women. In October 2018, the SMM was present at the EECF when a woman who had travelled with her five-year-old daughter from non-government- to government-controlled areas was stopped at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECF on her way back to Luhansk city due to the lack of authorization paper from the girl's father, of which the mother does not know the whereabouts. The mother told the SMM that she was not aware of the need to have a court order to travel from government- to non-government-controlled areas. Other groups that face challenges in crossing the contact line are persons released from prisons because their Ukrainian passports were either missing or had expired, and the "release documents" issued by the armed formations were not recognized as valid documentation at EECFs.

In view of the difficulties outlined above, a number of people are seeking support from free legal aid services provided by both State and non-government organizations, either available through telephone or in offices in

government-controlled areas including in the vicinity of the EECFs.⁴¹ For example, co-ordination centres run by the authorities have been established at all the EECFs to assist civilians crossing the contact line with documentation issues. However, the Mission noted limited access to legal aid providers in non-government-controlled areas, where such services are provided via telephone or online.

Other factors inhibiting civilian crossing

The Mission has gathered reports of residents on both sides of the contact line who refrain from crossing out of fear of possible repercussions by border guards at the EECFs or by the armed formations at non-government-controlled checkpoints, in particular due to confirmed or alleged association with the armed formations. In early 2018, people in non-government-controlled areas in Donetsk region who work in schools, hospitals or other entities, told the SMM that they had to sign a document acknowledging an "order" limiting the movement of certain individuals from travelling to government-controlled areas. Some of them said that they have to submit an application to their managers a week before travelling should they find it necessary to cross the contact line. In non-government-controlled Luhansk region, civilians working as "civil servants" or members of the education and health sector told the SMM that they had to become a member of the "Mir Luganshchine" movement.⁴²

⁴¹ The SMM refer cases to organizations and institutions mandated to support civilians facing difficulties to cross the contact line. Also, when approached by civilians in need of legal assistance, the SMM facilitates the establishment of contact with relevant actors.

⁴² "Mir Luganshchine" is a movement established on 2 November 2014 and led by senior members of the armed formations. According to the movement, all "employees" in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region (about 100,000) are obliged to join "Mir Luganshchine".

Several civilians have told the SMM that publication of the list of names has resulted in extensive questioning at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP or that they no longer cross the contact line for fear of repercussions. This requirement by the armed formations appears to impact women in particular as women are the majority of staff working in the education, health and other structures in non-government-controlled areas.

Similarly, residents in non-government-controlled areas have expressed fear of being affiliated with the armed formations, and placed on the public “Myrotvorets” list, a website indicating such affiliation. During the reporting period, interlocutors in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk regions told the Mission of at least four cases where members of the clergy were extensively questioned on both sides when crossing the contact line, and at least three cases where journalists were extensively questioned. The SMM has received reports from civilians whose friends or relatives have been detained or ill-treated at the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints in Luhansk and Donetsk regions.⁴³

⁴³ Such cases are referred to other organizations based on interlocutor’s consent.

CHAPTER 5: RECENT EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR CIVILIANS AT EECPS AND CORRESPONDING CHECKPOINTS

Despite the challenges outlined above, the Mission observed that progress has been made to improve the infrastructure at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. Of particular note is the disengagement in the agreed disengagement area near Stanytsia Luhanska which has allowed for the long-awaited repair of the broken section of the bridge to start. These developments are crucial to allow faster tracking and alleviate the hardship that civilians continue to face every day.

Process of reconstruction and improvement of infrastructure

During 2018 and in the beginning of 2019, the Ukrainian Government conducted maintenance and improvement works at all EECPs, including sturdier shelters in waiting areas, additional processing booths, provision of free potable water and sanitary facilities for people with disabilities.⁴⁴ From July to September 2018, the Donetsk regional State Administration reconstructed the processing area of the EECP in Marinka, the busiest vehicular crossing point. This was followed by infrastructure improvements at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP in September 2018, including new shelters and sanitary facilities.⁴⁵ Additional construction work to improve the crossing conditions took place in Maiorsk, Novotroitske and Marinka EECPs during

the autumn of 2018 and was finalized in the first half of 2019, and the Hnutove EECP closed due to repairs from 5 to 8 April 2019.

A similar process of reconstruction and improvement at the non-government-controlled checkpoints started in August 2018. The SMM observed improvements to the checkpoint near Olenivka, including an increase in the number of processing booths from eight to 20 booths, which has contributed to a smoother flow of vehicles and pedestrians.⁴⁶ Similar improvements have followed at the non-government-controlled checkpoints near Kreminets and Horlivka during September and October 2019.

Another positive development over the reporting period is that civilians crossing the contact line have easier access to information, especially on the government-controlled side. At all EECPs, the SMM has seen an increase in the availability of informative material, including billboards and information posters about crossing procedures, transportation services, information about anti-corruption, free legal aid services and other information, complemented by the presence of non-governmental organizations providing advice and distributing leaflets.

⁴⁴ In 2018, the Government of Ukraine allocated UAH 150 million to ensure adequate and dignified crossing conditions for civilians at EECPs, according to the UN Humanitarian Snapshot Checkpoints February 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ukraine_humanitarian_snapshot_checkpoints_20190214.pdf.

⁴⁵ See *SMM Daily Report 1 September 2018*.

⁴⁶ The SMM observed ten new containers to process documents and three new sanitary facilities on each side of the checkpoint, including two designed for people with disabilities. See *SMM Daily Report 29 August*.

Disengagement and repair works at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge

The pedestrian EECF near Stanytsia Luhanska and its corresponding checkpoint in non-government-controlled areas is the only one in the entire Luhansk region. It is one of the busiest crossing points in eastern Ukraine, with nearly 300,000 civilian crossings each month according to statistics from SBGS.⁴⁷ For four years, more than ten thousand people a day have had to walk across the wooden ramps on the broken section of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, which was destroyed in the beginning of 2015. The SMM has seen civilians having to undertake the 1.5km crossing on foot, struggling to climb up and down across unstable wooden ramps on their way to collect pensions, reach out to family, or purchase food and medication. The need to repair the bridge and alleviate the plight of

civilians had been highlighted for years by civilians, national and international organizations.

In this context, the start of disengagement near Stanytsia Luhanska on 26 June 2019,⁴⁸ in line with the Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware of 21 September 2016, and the subsequent decision reached in the TCG in Minsk on 17 July 2019, relating to the repair of the broken section of the bridge, are significant developments.⁴⁹

The TCG decision of 31 July pertaining to the clearance of vegetation and mines and other explosive ordnance from around the broken section of the bridge also proved instrumental in enabling its repair and constitutes an important step forward in ensuring the safe crossing of the contact line.⁵⁰



Preparatory construction work on the Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge

Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement area
Luhansk region
18 September 2019
Mini UAV Imagery

⁴⁷ SBGS crossing statistics available at: <https://dpsu.gov.ua/en/> (last accessed 01/11/19). The SMM noted that it is common for one person to complete the journey back and forth within one day, therefore crossing the contact line on two occasions.

⁴⁸ See [OSCE Press Release 26 June 2019](#).

⁴⁹ See [OSCE Press Release 18 July 2019](#).

⁵⁰ See [OSCE Press Release 31 July 2019](#).

On 4 October 2019, a 2.3m wide temporary bypass bridge was open for pedestrian traffic while work is being conducted by Ukrainian authorities to repair the broken section of the bridge.⁵¹ The bypass bridge allows civilians to cross on a levelled path for the first time since the original bridge was destroyed. On 20 November, the newly repaired section of the bridge opened. People with mobility problems can now cross on their wheelchairs or crutches and no longer have to climb down and up on the steep wooden ramps of the broken section of the bridge. Ukrainian authorities also repaired the road that leads from the EECP until the bridge and introduced a shuttle bus taking people to the bridge, thus easing conditions for civilians' crossing of the contact line, particularly alleviating the suffering of elderly people.⁵²

Throughout this process the SMM has continued to monitor and report on progress on the ground: the removal of mines and the clearance of vegetation along the sides of the road, the dismantling of certain military fortifications and the repair of the bridge.⁵³ Several residents on both sides of the contact line told the SMM that they welcomed the recent developments at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge and expressed their hopes for opening of new EECPs and corresponding checkpoints.



Completion of construction work on the Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge

Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement area
Luhansk region
21 November 2019
Mini UAV Imagery

⁵¹ See SMM Daily Report 5 October 2019

⁵² In addition to the shuttle buses provided by Ukrainian authorities, two golf carts operated by the UNHCR has been taking crossing civilians from the EECP to the bridge.

⁵³ Despite the removal, on 26 October 2019, of a blue container with the inscription "JCCC" (Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination) previously installed by the armed formations about 50m south of the broken section of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, some fortifications remain around the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the bridge. The Mission also continued to observe the daily presence inside the disengagement area of members of the armed formations, including some wearing armbands with "JCCC" written on them.

CONCLUSION

The contact line in eastern Ukraine, now in existence for more than five years, continues to divide Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and restricts their freedom of movement. Its surroundings are heavily mined and the overall security situation remains unpredictable, consequently putting civilians at risk when they cross the five EECPs and corresponding checkpoints.

The SMM has documented that the crossings are difficult and tiring, and civilians have to go through a multitude of challenges ranging from security risks to documentation issues. The hardships are often exacerbated by the lack of adequate infrastructure and medical assistance. Over the reporting period, the SMM corroborated ten civilian casualties that occurred close to EECPs and corresponding checkpoints and 40 civilians, mostly elderly, died due to natural causes, such as strokes and heart attacks, while waiting to cross the contact line in all weather conditions.

Despite the hazards and persisting challenges, tens of thousands of civilians continue to cross every day to access pensions and social benefits, social services and civil documents, visit family members who are separated due to the conflict, check property, as well as to purchase items, such as food and medicine. Easing the administrative and legal burdens to access pensions and documentation such as birth and death certificates would contribute to reducing the pressure on the crossing points.

The SMM has observed steps to improve conditions at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. Of particular note is the disengagement in the area of Stanytsia Luhanska and the long-awaited reconstruction of the broken section of the bridge.

At other EECPs and corresponding checkpoints, the SMM has observed new processing booths and shelters yet civilians still remain without medical support and other services in areas between the most forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations.

The adoption of electronic permits without time limitation is contributing to easing the crossing of civilians. However, further measures are needed to improve the complex and lengthy crossing procedures and to ensure that the newly developed crossing facilities have sufficient staff to process people, minimising the time needed to cross. The adoption of electronic permits without time limitation is one of the legal measures which can further contribute to easing the crossing of civilians. The SMM also sees the need for an uninterrupted, streamlined transportation system for civilians to cross the contact line, in contrast to the many stages of transportation and document checks currently in place.

The SMM recognizes positive steps towards improvement of the situation for the civilians crossing. However, there remains an acute need for the opening of additional EECPs to process both pedestrians and civilians traveling in vehicles, particularly in Luhansk region, and to increase opportunities for people to move freely in Ukraine, under safe and dignified conditions.