



March marked a year since the almost complete closure of the “contact line” and the introduction of severe movement restrictions for millions of conflict-affected people, particularly those living in non-Government-controlled areas (NGCA), resulting in a drastic drop in civilian crossings compared to the pre-COVID-19 times. The recent surge in hostilities along the “contact line” after seven months of relative calm following the July 2020 ceasefire is a stark reminder of the hardship and security risks the conflict-weary people are forced to take to maintain their social connections and to access essential services not available in NGCA. In the meantime, one of the two open entry/exit crossing points (EECPs) in eastern Ukraine – “Stanytsia Luhanska” – continued to account for 96 per cent of all monthly crossings.

OPERATIONAL UPDATES



Delivery of humanitarian convoys to Donetsk oblast (NGCA) was not possible during March as the EECP “Novotroitske”¹ – the only operational crossing point in the oblast – was closed for humanitarian cargo movement since 24 February due to security concerns. At the same time, the EECP continued to permit twice-a-week civilian crossings, and there was a 32 per cent increase of individual crossings through the EECP compared with February. Movement between the two regions in NGCA was also restricted, reportedly due to COVID-19 concerns, meaning that it was also not possible to send a humanitarian convoy to Donetsk oblast (NGCA) through Luhanska oblast (NGCA) using the EECP “Shchastia”. Joint advocacy efforts are ongoing to ensure humanitarian actors’ ability to continue to send humanitarian convoys directly to Donetsk and Luhanska oblast (NGCA).



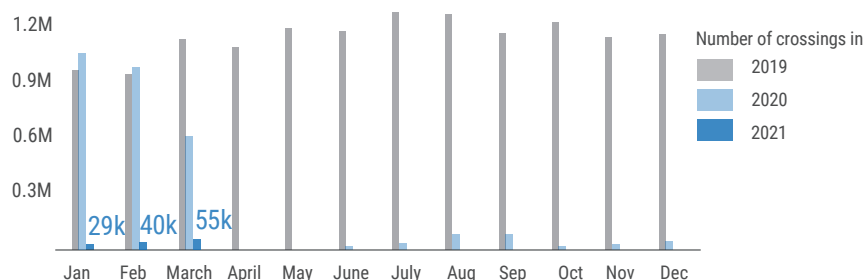
Recent anecdotal reports indicate **a noticeable increase of people living in NGCA travelling to Government-controlled areas (GCA) by passing through the Russian Federation** due to the restrictions on crossing the “contact line”. This travel requires movement across the uncontrolled Ukrainian-Russian in NGCA, and re-entering Ukraine through the crossing point “Milove”² in the northern part of Luhanska oblast. Those making this journey may be subject to administrative fines and legal challenges, in addition to incurring high travel costs. There are reports that this border crossing point may not have the capacity to meet the increased crossing demands.



People living in NGCA willing to receive COVID-19 vaccines in GCA will be exempted from the mandatory two-week self-quarantine, as per the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine amended decree from 22 March. The exemption will be granted upon showing evidence of an individual vaccination schedule. Meanwhile, COVID-19 antigen testing is now available free-of-charge at the EECP “Stanytsia Luhanska”, while this service has been available at the EECP “Novotroitske” since January 2021. The availability of free tests is allowing more vulnerable people to cancel mandatory self-quarantine in GCA³, however the number of tests available remains insufficient to meet demand.

1. The “Novotroitske” entry/exit crossing point has been reopened for humanitarian cargo movement since 15 April.
2. The “Milove” border crossing point was reported to have the capacity to facilitate the crossing of 500 people and 300 vehicles a day.
3. The mandatory two-week self-quarantine for people travelling to GCA was cancelled by the Cabinet of Ministers on 5 January, subject to a negative PCR or antigen test result.

COMPARISON OF THE MONTHLY CIVILIAN CROSSINGS (Jan - March)



ENTRY/EXIT CROSSING POINTS (EECPs) MAP



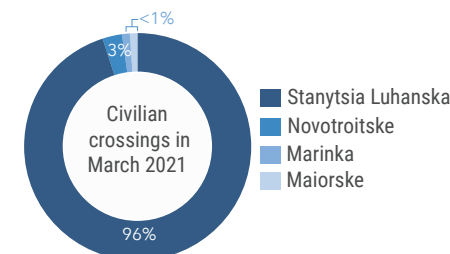
KEY FIGURES



Number of crossings of people in March 2021



Number of crossings of vehicles in March 2021



CIVILIAN CROSSINGS AT EECPs

EECP	GCA to NGCA		NGCA to GCA	
	FEB	MARCH	FEB	MARCH
STANYTSIA LUHANSKA	18,906	26,514	19,439	26,216
NOVOTROITSKE	704	990	603	945
MAIORSKE	0	7	0	3
MARINKA	6	1	6	0
HNUTOVE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	19,616	27,512	20,048	27,164

MAIN REASONS TO CROSS



Visiting relatives



Withdrawing cash



Recovering a pension