

IOM PREVENTS COVID-19 INFECTION AND ISOLATION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE

“*It is so helpful to receive materials for disinfection! With the COVID-19 pandemic, the consumption has skyrocketed. We must disinfect all the vehicles and all the boxes with goods that we bring in,*” said Liudmyla, director of the Psychoneurological Care Home in Vesela Dolyna, Donetsk Oblast.

An internally displaced person herself, Liudmyla has the responsibility to run this facility only 17km away from the line of contact. *“There are 350 people here, of whom more than one hundred are bedridden,”* she said. *“Before the quarantine, one could organize excursions, concerts and games to keep the spirits up, but now we can only feel how isolated we are and how difficult it is to communicate with the outside.”*

Vesela Dolyna Psychoneurological Care Home is one of over 110 medical and social institutions in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that were reached through the IOM infection prevention and control programme in the period October–November 2020. The programme not only supports institutions with essential hygiene supplies, washing machines, driers and disinfection cabinets but also promotes a safe and enabling environment for health practitioners and social workers. That is why IOM also provided 1,300 social workers with contactless thermometers, masks, face shields and gloves, to support their essential work with vulnerable outpatients.

The assistance was provided with support from the German Government and the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) as part of the IOM global response to COVID-19.



Liudmyla, director of the Psychoneurological Care Home in Vesela Dolyna, Donetsk Oblast, receives aid from the German Government and IOM
Photo: IOM / Viktoriia Zhabokrytska



A client of Hirnyk Territorial Centre of Social Services, Donetsk Oblast, uses a mobile handwashing station installed by IOM earlier this year
Photo: IOM / Artem Hetman



Workers unload a washing machine IOM delivered to a social service centre. Selidove, Donetsk Oblast
Photo: IOM / Artem Hetman

“WEAR A MASK. DON’T MASK YOUR FEELINGS”

IOM SUPPORTS SAFE ACCESS TO PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS OF UKRAINE



IOM campaign billboard displayed in Bakhmut, Donetsk Oblast

Through a public campaign launched in November 2020, IOM is promoting the importance of mental health and psychosocial support among Eastern Ukrainian communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A dedicated emotional support hotline is available to the population of all oblasts of Ukraine, thanks to the support of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

As in many other countries, also in Ukraine the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable communities. Families in the Eastern Conflict Area have already suffered from six years of stress and fear over the insecurities induced by

a protracted conflict. This had a deep impact on their wellbeing, their access to basic services and their livelihood. In early 2020, reports of psychological issues spiked as communities struggled with the additional uncertainties brought by the outbreak of the COVID-19

pandemic and its effects on existing vulnerabilities.

Among the most at-risk social groups, the elderly represent over 36 per cent of the total population in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Most of them leave out



“When will I see my grandchildren?”
 Watch the campaign video
 on [IOM Ukraine YouTube](#)



of meagre pensions and, as a result of the pandemic, their overall vulnerability has dramatically increased, as they are also most likely to become more and more isolated.

The impact of infection risk mitigation measures on the economy of small communities has been disastrous, with terrible consequences on people’s wellbeing and mental health, hugely affecting the most fragile community members struggling to make ends meet and provide for their families. According to IOM data (June 2020), as many as 70 per cent of female-headed displaced households with children reported having just enough money for food, or that the decreased family income compelled them to save on meals. Women are disproportionately affected all over the country. They take on additional care roles within the family, which has been exacerbated by the closure of schools and social institutions. The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine reports that cases of domestic violence have

almost doubled from May 2019 (795 registered cases) to May 2020 (1,511).

With the support of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), in September 2020 IOM has launched a toll-free emotional support [hotline \(0 800 211 444\)](#) to support the most vulnerable Ukrainians in coping with the psychosocial challenges posed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the hotline, in little of over two months, a team of ten psychologists have provided individual counselling and multiple follow-up sessions to over 270 callers mostly from Donetsk and Luhansk government-controlled areas (with age range 14-81, 80 per cent of whom are women). IOM psychologists have also been working closely with local authorities, as well as with social and medical institutions in these regions to train staff on how to manage their own stress and better manage the needs of the communities they serve.

On 16 November, IOM Ukraine has launched the information campaign **“Wear Your Mask, Don’t Mask Your Feelings!”** in the government-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. The campaign will contribute to overcoming the general stigma associated with seeking psychological support and will highlight the importance of seeking mental health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through billboards, posters in train carts, articles on traditional and social media, as well as TV and radio broadcasting, IOM not only shared messages on the importance of wearing a mask but also provided avenues for seeking mental health and psychosocial support by publicizing its MHPSS hotline. IOM now plans to expand its awareness-raising campaign to regions neighbouring those more directly affected by the conflict, namely Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kherson and Zaporizhia.



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