Certification of Education for Children from Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA)

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine that started in 2014 continues to have a devastating impact on children, youth, education personnel and the whole education system. There is widespread evidence of the cumulative effects of the conflict on 735,000 children and teachers\(^1\) learning and teaching in 3,500 education facilities in the wider affected areas. Access to education is intermittently disrupted and the wellbeing and learning of children and youth is severely affected due to conflict-related stress, trauma, prolonged toxic stress, socioeconomic difficulties and the context of a general economic decline in the region. Children and communities living in Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) are of a particular concern and experience multiple constrains and obstacles related to the recognition of their education attainments which affects their access to vocational, higher education and the job market in the Government Controlled Areas (GCA).

Since 2014 the education system has splintered worsening pre-existing conditions in the education sector. At the moment there are three disconnected education systems in Ukraine GCA with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) based in the capital city of Kyiv, Donetska NGCA and Luhanska NGCA with their own de-facto MoESs based in Donetsk city and Luhansk city respectively. The separation was reinforced by differences in the language of instruction (since 2014 Russian became primary language of instruction in NGCA\(^2\), including standards, curriculum and policies, while in Ukraine the primary language of instruction is Ukrainian as reflected in the Language Law\(^3\) (endorsed in April 2019). Both in GCA and NGCA systems went through a reform process. In GCA, in 2016 the concept of the New Ukrainian School\(^4\) was presented together with the implementation plan of the reform. New de-facto Education Laws were designed in both Donetska NGCA\(^5\) and Luhanska NGCA\(^6\) incorporating elements of Russian education system into the existing curriculum. For example, grading systems are different with 12 scores in GCA and 5 scores in NGCA. In autumn 2014, 18 higher education institutions\(^7\) were relocated from NGCA to GCA. Displaced universities faced severe challenges as significant part of staff, equipment and resources left behind and currently are a part of de-facto Higher Education System of so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic” (LPR) and “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DPR).

Since 2014\(^8\), according to the Ukraine Education Cluster estimates as of beginning of the 2019 school year, the number of children and youth who received school certificates issued by the de facto authorities in NGCA reached 120,000 (including 9 and 11 grades). This is a 21 per cent increase compared to 2018\(^9\). This number is progressively growing and might reach 140,000 students by the end of the 2019 – 2020 school year.

Recognition of education certificates

After 5 years of conflict, there is still a lack of consistency in the recognition and certification of the learning outcomes achieved by children in NGCA outside of so-called DPR and LPR. Under these circumstances, children’s rights to education and to development become major concerns, as the protracted conflict is putting a generation of school graduates at risk of diminishing opportunities to continue higher education.

---

1. Of these, 670,000 are estimated to be children and 67,000 teachers. 343,000 learn and teach in GCA and another 394,000 in NGCA in Donetska and Luhanska oblasts.
2. Based on de-facto laws on education both Ukrainian and Russian languages are considered as language of instruction. Bud, according to de-facto there is no request to use Ukrainian as language of instruction.
5. https://dnrsovet.su/zakon-dnr-ob-obrazovaniyi/
7. The list of displaced Universities
8. Last time widely recognized Ukrainian certificates in what is now NGCA were received by school graduates in June 2014.
9. The Ukraine Education Cluster estimates
As a result of the efforts made by the humanitarian community, there are some positive developments regarding the recognition of some legal documents issued in NGCA. For example, on 18 January 2018, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the law no. 2268 “On particular aspects of public policy aimed at safeguarding state sovereignty of Ukraine over the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions”. The law reaffirms the invalidity of all documents issued in NGCA, but introduces an exception for “documents certifying facts of birth or death of a person”. These documents may be attached to applications for birth/death registration by a civil registry office in Ukraine.

However, the formal mechanism to recognize diplomas and education certificates issued in NGCA does not exist in Ukraine at the moment. The current procedure of nostrification of diplomas from the Russian Federation for citizens from NGCA remains unclear and requires additional research. For instance, there was recently a case of Ukrainian authorities rejecting nostrification of a diploma issued by the Russian Federation as it was outlined that the first few years of studies took place in Luhanska NGCA.

### Distance learning and external studies modalities: constraints and challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children from NGCA in distance learning in GCA</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donetska oblast</td>
<td>1651</td>
<td>2238</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>3400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luhanska oblast</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on data as of the 2018-2019 school year, 890 children from NGCA were enrolled in distance/external learning in Luhanska GCA and 3,400 in Donetska GCA, which equals 2% out of 230,000 primary and secondary school-aged children in NGCA.

Several barriers were identified in access of children from NGCA to distance/external learning modalities in GCA:

- Expenses associated with education in GCA (crossing the contact line for the child younger than 16 years of age with 2 parents or with permission from one of the parents in accordance to the Ukrainian legislation, staying in GCA for a few days to pass exams from one grade to another, etc.).
- Parents’ inability to cross the contact line from NGCA due to various reasons (e.g. employment in de-facto government, association with the armed groups, involvement in the education, health or financial systems etc.).
- Absence of valid Ukrainian passports.
- Additional pressure on children to study extra subjects (most of those using distance learning are also enrolled in NGCA schools).

In addition to existing funding, supply and capacity limitations, the lack of systemic approaches on how to enroll children from NGCA, how to calculate the workload for teachers and compensate their efforts, together with the lack of equipment and methodological materials remain the most critical issues.

Although efforts are being made to assist those students to attain certification in Ukraine to facilitate the process of distance learning and pass exams to enter university, it is likely that only a limited number of learners who want to access education in GCA, or take national exams to enter university, are able to do so.

### Continuation of education: Access to vocational and higher education

Children and youth seeking education outside of the NGCA face many obstacles to access higher education. There are several options for continuation of education both in vocational or higher education, which are common among children and youth, namely NGCA, Ukraine (via regular or simplified procedures), or the Russian Federation. All mentioned options have their own requirements and limitations.

In NGCA 25 higher education facilities remain operational. As of August 2019, 4 higher education facilities in Donetska NGCA have obtained the Russian Federation accreditation giving the opportunity for future graduates to receive widely-recognized diploma of higher education. In Luhanska NGCA, 3 universities are in the same process of obtaining the Russian Federation accreditation. Additionally, in late 2019, two schools in Donetska NGCA are planning to start the process of accreditation by the Russian educational system which aims to provide the opportunity for children from NGCA to enter the job market outside of the NGCA.

---

11. Acceptance of foreign university degrees as equal with native
pass final Russian exams in Donetsk city without traveling outside so-called DPR and LPR.\textsuperscript{14} If this trend continues it will obviously lead to the integration of higher and vocational education into the Russian system. The simplified procedure of receiving Russian passport by citizens of NGCA initiated in April 2019 will most likely catalyze this process.

The MoES in Ukraine developed the simplified procedure for children from NGCA.\textsuperscript{15} This procedure provides a mechanism of partial recognition of secondary education competencies of children from NGCA, allowing them to continue their education in a limited number of vocational and/or higher education facilities mainly based in Donetska and Luhanska oblasts in GCA.

This simplified procedure consists of few steps. Firstly, a graduate from the list which includes the whole NGCA and some GCA settlements, choses an educational center based in one of the 40 higher or 62 vocational facilities\textsuperscript{16}. Secondly, that educational center redirects the child to the secondary school for passing the exams in Ukrainian language/literature and history of Ukraine (both subjects have limited hours in NGCA curriculum). Thirdly, following school exams, the child receives the Ukrainian certificate and could pass exams for entering higher or vocational education facility. However, this certificate includes score only for exams, without all other subjects. So, the child cannot enter any other education facility with this certificate nor transfer from one facility to another. This implies that this procedure provides an opportunity to continue education but not to receive widely recognized secondary school certificate.

Another way to continue education in Ukraine goes through the regular procedure which requires enrollment in Ukrainian school via distance learning or external studies and passing the final exam in Ukraine. This option is linked with additional pressure and workflow on children, costs and security concerns for crossing the contact line at least a few times.

For the continuation of education in the Russian Federation children face almost the same obstacles: need to pass final exams outside NGCA, limited list of education facilities, etc.

### Related concerns and obstacles for children from NGCA

- Diplomas and Education Certificates of NGCA are not widely recognized outside NGCA.
- Higher education institutions in GCA require Ukrainian an education certificate, final exams and IDs for regular procedure or is limited in options for simplified procedure, and implies additional expenses and extra efforts.
- The requirements for continuation of higher education in the Russian Federation are not clear, with controversial evidence regarding procedure simplicity.

### Impact of absence of recognized educational certificates on children and youth

This process might have long-term negative consequences for children and youth, with impact on their ability to study and develop outside NGCA at university or vocational schools, build their career and achieve their fullest potential for social integration and individual development. Children’s rights are being violated by absence of recognized educational certificates, it underpins social cohesion and contributes to the creation of lost generations. Further separation of education systems in GCA and NGCA creates additional barriers for possible peacebuilding and reintegration.

The consultations among the members of the Ukraine Education Cluster pointed out the need to facilitate the process of searching for possible solutions, in collaboration with key stakeholders.

### Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contacts</th>
<th>Sources:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denis Puzhalin, Cluster Coordinator, <a href="mailto:educationcluster.ukraine@gmail.com">educationcluster.ukraine@gmail.com</a>, +380 66 606 2435</td>
<td>MoES of Ukraine; De facto MoESs in Donetsk and Luhanska NGCA; The Ukraine Education Cluster estimates; Open sources; UN CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Kashuba, Field Coordinator, <a href="mailto:ukr.edu.filed@humanitarianresponse.info">ukr.edu.filed@humanitarianresponse.info</a>, +380 50 518 8412</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} \url{http://dnr-live.ru/v-2020-dve-shkolyi-dnr-poluchat-rossiyskuju-akkreditatsiyu/}  
\textsuperscript{15} \url{https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0907-16/n13}  
\textsuperscript{16} As of June 2019, \url{https://mon.gov.ua/ua/zhitelyam-donbasu-ta-krimu/studentam/osvitni-centri/osvitni-centri-donbas-ukrayina}
Graduate’s choice in %
(Education Cluster estimates as of October 2019 data)

- **Ukraine (via regular procedure)**
  - Graduates from NGCA can continue higher education in GCA with Ukrainian education certificate.
  - Regular procedure requirements:
    - to be enrolled in GCA school via for distance/‘external’ studies
    - to pass final exams
    - to cross ‘contact line’ several times

- **Ukraine (via simplified procedure)**
  - Graduates from NGCA can continue higher education in limited number of higher education facilities in GCA via simplified procedure (40 higher education facilities and 62 vocational schools) without Ukrainian education certificate.
  - Simplified procedure requirements:
    - to pass exam in Ukrainian language
    - to cross ‘contact line’ at least once

- **NGCA**
  - In NGCA school graduates can either continue education or enter a job market.
  - For continuation of education there are 25 higher education facilities and 178 vocational schools.
  - Diplomas of this education facilities are not widely recognized outside NGCA

- **Russian Federation**
  - The requirements for continuation of higher education in Russia are not clear and controversial evidence regarding simplicity of the procedure exists.
  - Some requirements:
    - to pass final exams in Russia
    - to possess documents issued by de-facto authorities in NGCA
    - to cross the border

- **Other**
  - Some of other options include:
    - continuation of education in other countries;
    - continuation of higher education outside NGCA via distance learning modalities;
    - entering a job market outside of NGCA