



# Strengthening the capacity of local shops through humanitarian response

The prolonged military conflict in Ukraine, and now the quarantine restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, has dealt a heavy blow to small and medium-sized businesses. The economic crisis has had a particularly negative impact on the living conditions of those Ukrainians who live and work along the contact line. Businesses located in remote settlements with severely damaged transport infrastructure and a high level of unemployment, are in need of support more than ever.

The French International Humanitarian Organization, Triangle Génération Humanitaire (TGH) has been implementing projects in Ukraine for five years that aim at supporting the most vulnerable groups affected by the armed conflict in the East of the country. Supporting the local economy through partnering with local shops remains one of the key components of TGH's projects.

TGH currently cooperates with more than 100 partner shops involved in the distribution of e-vouchers<sup>1</sup> for food and hygiene products.

TGH's cooperation with partner shops ensures wider coverage and improved access of the beneficiaries living in the most remote locations to humanitarian aid through home delivery of goods

TGH's partner shops use a modern electronic web terminal that works through the mobile money system. It allows transactions to be carried out online through a telephone. As part of the project, the shops undergo training in using the web terminal, which not only guarantees the efficiency of online transactions but also represents a professional training for the teams.



TGH team conducts training on the use of the web interface for partner shops. "Serezhka" shop, Bakhmut, Donetsk oblast. November 2020. ©A.Hetman



Each TGH partner shop is equipped with an easy-to-use web interface for e-voucher redeeming. Shchastia, Luhansk oblast. March 2021. ©A.Hetman



The shop "Romashka" is one of 110 partner shops participating in TGH's projects. Novoselivka, Volnovaskyi rayon, Donetsk oblast. March 2021. © S.Volskiy

Participation in project activities allows the staff to improve their communication skills and learn or reinforce their knowledge in the e-voucher system management.

For 90% of the partner shops, participation in TGH's emergency response projects contributes to strengthen the links between shop owners, staff and beneficiaries. It also enables the shops to attract new customers and substantially increase their turnover. Their income indeed increases on average from 10 to 60% during the period of e-voucher redeeming. In addition, participation in TGH activities provides an opportunity to gain new experience and improve communication skills within the community, which is especially meaningful for isolated settlements along the contact line.

At present TGH, with the support of local shops, implements projects in more than 200 settlements along the contact line, covering more than 480,000 people. It is important that the engagement of partner shops in the TGH's project contributes to the opening of new opportunities for the development and support of entrepreneurial activity. As a result, the shops become a critical link in the chain of providing humanitarian aid, making a significant contribution to local assistance.

<sup>1</sup> E-vouchers (or electronic vouchers) are an innovative approach based on technologies, mobile networks, the Internet and web money. The e-voucher system ensures rapid and effective humanitarian response and allows reaching beneficiaries in hard to reach localities along the contact line.

## The Budaev family, entrepreneurs from Lugansk, evoke their long-term partnership with TGH:

".. We dreamt of starting our own business. We understood how difficult it would be for us, so we started looking for support. We filled out a number of questionnaires for participation in various government programs and international organizations providing material assistance to start our own business. We knocked on all the doors but were denied for various reasons. Our hope faded.

In June 2018, we were able to rent a premise and start our own business. But the turning point for us was the meeting with Triangle Génération Humanitaire<sup>2</sup> (TGH) that proposed a partnership. It was the first time when we heard about the unique project based on the provision of e-vouchers for food and hygiene goods that supports both vulnerable people (by allocating funds for priority needs) and businesses (shops along the contact line get an opportunity to participate in humanitarian projects).

After signing the contract, we became a partner shop and learnt how to use the web terminal for the redeeming of e-vouchers. Thanks to this project, about a hundred new customers visited our shop during the next two weeks. Our income increased, which allowed us to purchase additional equipment for our business.

In 2020, we were invited to participate in TGH activities for the fifth time. This time we redeemed the e-vouchers for hygiene items, not for households, but for public institutions: schools, kindergartens, healthcare institutions. It was a new stage in our development. We truly thank TGH for this opportunity and experience.

We want to emphasize that cooperation with TGH is not just about financial support. It is first of all about humanity and help.

Thanks to our acquaintance and cooperation with TGH, we now know for sure that there are people who care about vulnerable people in these difficult times, especially given the global indifference for the victims of the conflict in the East of the country and the global COVID-19 pandemic. It inspires us to take action."



Budaev's store delivers essential hygiene items to the outpatient clinic in Stanychno-Luhansk as part of the TGH project to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Shchastynskiy rayon, Luhansk Oblast. April 2021. TGH

<sup>2</sup> TGH has been working in Ukraine since 2015, implementing new projects to provide vital humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected population of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.