



NONVIOLENT
PEACEFORCE

KHARKIV SNAPSHOT

CIVILIAN PROTECTION NEEDS &
RESPONSES IN UKRAINE

BACKGROUND

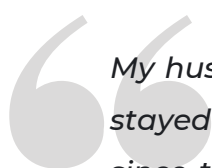
This snapshot presents key conclusions from a rapid protection assessment conducted in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv in May 2022 by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP). It builds on analysis and recommendations published earlier in May 2022 as part of a broader assessment of protection needs and responses in Ukraine.

The snapshot demonstrates that in Kharkiv and surrounds, there is an ongoing protection crisis that predominantly impacts the elderly and people with disabilities. Unable or unwilling to evacuate, many of those who are older, have disabilities, or those who are their carers, are unable to access shelters during ongoing shelling and missile attacks. For those who can move to bunkers or other shelters, these are often ill-equipped to serve the hundreds of people who continue to use them for safety from attacks.

These populations are often isolated from public and humanitarian services, and continue to struggle in the face of lack of medicines, food, and other essentials. This impacts people returning to these areas, despite ongoing risk. These challenges are exacerbated in areas occupied by Russian forces and close to frontlines.

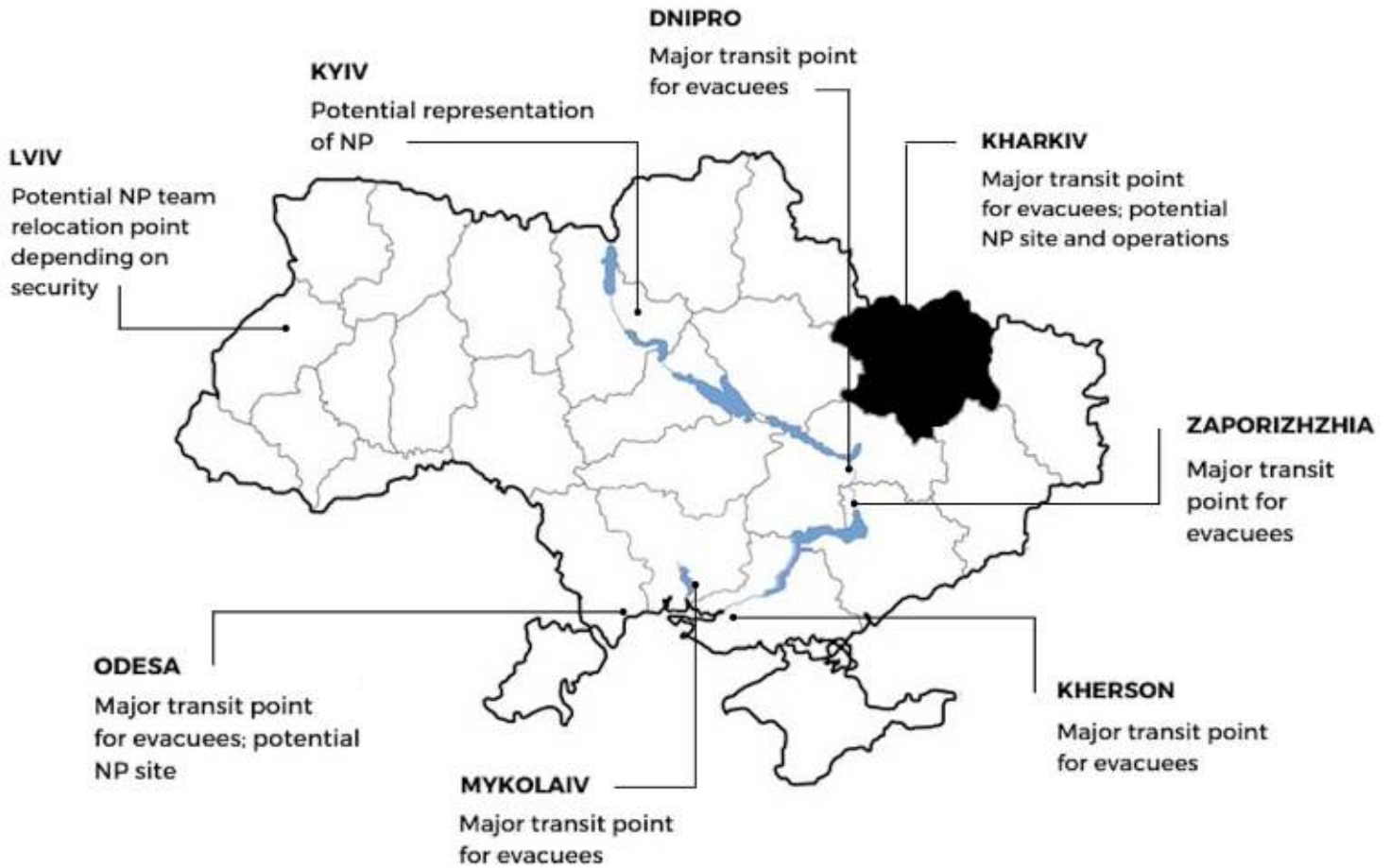
This snapshot builds on over 50 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and meetings included in the initial assessment, providing a snapshot analysis of the situation in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv. The rapid assessment took place over three days in late May 2022, comprising an additional 15 KIIs with civilians and local humanitarians directly impacted by the conflict, as well as field observations and desk research.

In interviews with civilians, the NP assessment team sought to evaluate protection concerns across different age, gender, and socio-economic demographics; experiences of displacement, evacuation, and return; safety and security; protection risks to vulnerable groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and children; and access to humanitarian services.



My husband and I retired so we took a decision not to evacuate. Our son stayed too. He didn't want to leave us. We've been in [the bomb shelter] since the first day of the war. Even here, a sound of shelling is very loud. My husband and son sometimes go outside but I'm too scared - Valentina, an elderly resident in Chuhuiv.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS



During the two-day visit, NP team met with local volunteer-led, self-organised groups providing immediate aid to conflict-affected communities in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv. Specifically, NP visited the psychiatric hospital, local NGO-run bomb shelter and kitchen, community-managed bomb shelters, and civilians impacted by continuous missile attacks.

Having conducted KIIs, NP team concluded that Kharkiv and surrounding areas are accessible and should be serviced by international humanitarian organisations, even if based and operational in nearby cities, such as Dnipro and Poltava.

PROTECTION NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

The rapid assessment identified and confirmed a number of key populations at heightened protection risk and with specific protection needs. This analysis aligns with protection concerns highlighted by the Ukrainian Government, and through the Protection Cluster and related Sub-Clusters. In-depth analysis across these areas of interest is available through NP for interested partners.

OLDER PEOPLE

As with other areas in Ukraine, older people face particular protection risks in Kharkiv and surrounding areas. Often unable to evacuate due to mobility, health, or economic issues, or unwilling to leave their homes, elderly people in Kharkiv, Chuhuiv and surrounds continue to face the threat of shelling and missile attacks. Amid these threats, many are unable to access shelters or bunkers due to mobility issues. In addition, older people struggle to access essential items such as medicines due to inaccessibility of pharmacies and other services. Older people we interviewed were almost entirely reliant on volunteers for food access. Though some reported they were well served by local authorities in response to conflict-related damage and utility outages, others complained that these services remained suspended in their areas. Many reported difficulties or inability to access pensions since the outbreak of conflict in late February.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities also face particular protection risks in Ukraine, including Kharkiv and Chuhuiv. Like older people, people with disabilities often face particular protection risks linked to lack of mobility (both in terms of access to shelters, evacuation, and to services), health issues, or economic disadvantage. The war has also resulted in mass displacement of specialist care professionals who serve people with specific needs in specialist facilities, resulting in severely understaffed facilities, and care professionals who remain at severe risk of burn-out.

REGIONAL POPULATIONS

Protection concerns and priorities for all populations, but especially older people and people with disabilities, are exacerbated outside of central metropolitan areas. In outer suburbs and small towns in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv regions, there is extremely limited humanitarian support being delivered. As travel to central areas where aid

services are concentrated is difficult or impossible for many – both due to mobility challenges, and the ongoing threat of violence - those who reside in regional areas are often unable to access humanitarian aid.

RETURNEES

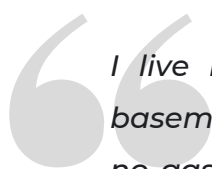
In both Kharkiv and Chuhuiv, people who previously evacuated have begun to return to these areas having previously evacuated. This is despite ongoing attacks by Russian forces, including in civilian areas with ongoing reports of civilian injuries and deaths. The central reason cited for these returns by civilians was economic necessity, with a lack of employment and higher costs of living in the west of Ukraine prompting people to return despite ongoing risks of violence.

CHILD PROTECTION

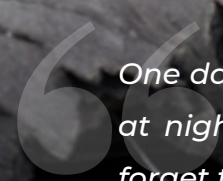
Though many children and families were evacuated from Kharkiv and surrounds since late February, some still remain. For these children, the last months have been extremely challenging, with psychological distress reported by parents in relation to shelling and artillery, long-term sheltering in underground bunkers, and lack of access to school and social connection. Many of the children that remain in Kharkiv have had limited access to humanitarian services and support.

PROTECTION THREATS IN OCCUPIED AREAS

Though occupied areas near Kharkiv and Chuhuiv were not able to be accessed as part of this assessment, civilians in these areas often have contact with people living under occupation due to their close proximity. Civilians in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv, echoing other media reports from these areas, raised major concerns about starvation and lack of access to assistance in occupied areas, as well as reports of sexual and gender-based violence.



I live in a one-bedroom apartment with my wife. I can't go to the basement. [Since the war has begun] we have no heating, no electricity, no gas. The only thing we have, it is desire to live and survive. We don't have a single food shop nor a pharmacy nearby. I survived a heart attack and now need to take medicine daily. The nearest pharmacy is three kilometers away, if it's open. I wish local authorities would be more attentive to people's needs. If you have a disability, you are cast aside. I have lived with disability since childhood. Everything has always been a struggle and sometimes I lose hope - Yuri, an elderly person with disability living in Kharkiv.



One day, I decided to go back home as it was quiet. But fighting resumed at night. I stayed in a cellar of my house that whole night. I will never forget that night. I was the worst night of my life - Nina, an elderly resident in Chuhuiv.

PROTECTION RESPONSES

Ongoing shelling and missile attacks in Kharkiv region have made access to affected populations difficult for humanitarian service providers. As highlighted in the overall assessment findings for Ukraine, conflict-affected communities in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv have been overwhelmingly reliant on community-based volunteer aid mobilisations. Some groups are supported with funding and material aid resources by international humanitarian organisations. Others, such as one community we interviewed in Chuhuiv, work independently as mutual-aid collectives – one person per street is appointed as a coordinator, whose role it is to check on those who are unable to leave their homes or access food and other essentials independently. While this work occurs, attacks are ongoing.

As noted in the broader assessment findings, this kind of community aid mobilisation will continue to be essential, and should be supported. At the same time, the overwhelming reliance on volunteer labor to deliver humanitarian support raises major sustainability questions in terms of burn-out, and ethical concerns related to risk-burden placed on local humanitarian actors. People are also fearful of reporting protection concerns and violence because of the socially embedded nature of this response and fear of retaliation. There is a lack of third-party oversight and accountability for the ways that aid is delivered and provided.

URGENT ACTION

There are a number of urgent actions that humanitarian actors, donors, and communities can take to address the protection concerns outlined above.

1. In addition to financial and in-kind aid support, there is a need for capacity-strengthening and mentoring support for civil society groups, mutual aid collectives, local organisations and volunteers currently mobilised as part of the humanitarian response;
2. Scaling up of humanitarian presence in areas like Kharkiv and Chuhuiv currently underserved by international humanitarian organisations, who can play a critical role in supporting ongoing efforts by local actors;
3. Dedicated attention to older populations and people with disabilities to ensure that they have accessible, safe spaces to shelter during attacks, access to medicines and other essential items, and access to specialist services if they wish to evacuate to safer areas;

4. Dedicated efforts to decentralise humanitarian aid and services distribution, so they are accessible outside of metropolitan areas;
5. Scaling up of on-the-ground and virtual mental health and psycho-social support, particularly specialist services for older people and children;
6. Renewed recognition of the economic challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Eastern regions like Kharkiv and Chuhuiv due to higher costs of living in Western Ukraine, and a scaling up of efforts such as cash for protection, multi-purpose cash grants, and livelihoods initiatives;
7. Ongoing negotiations at the political level to increase accessibility of humanitarian assistance to occupied areas.



“My grandson used to study in a university in Kharkiv until recently. He is in Lviv now. The bombing is also frequent there. He says: “What’s the point to be here. It is not safe either. Perhaps I should just return”. Shelters are overcrowded he says. When I speak to him on the phone, I sometimes hear the shelling. He doesn’t want to me to worry. He says: “Grandma, it’s just a tram.” He is eighteen-year-old. I am worried about him - Nina.”

URGENT ACTION

01 Capacity-strengthening for civil society groups

02 Scaling up of humanitarian presence in Kharkiv & Chuhuiv

03 Dedicated attention to elderly populations & people with disabilities

04 Dedicated efforts to decentralise humanitarian aid & services distribution

05 Scaling up of on-the-ground & virtual mental health & psycho-social support

06 Renewed recognition of the economic challenges

07 Ongoing negotiations at the political level