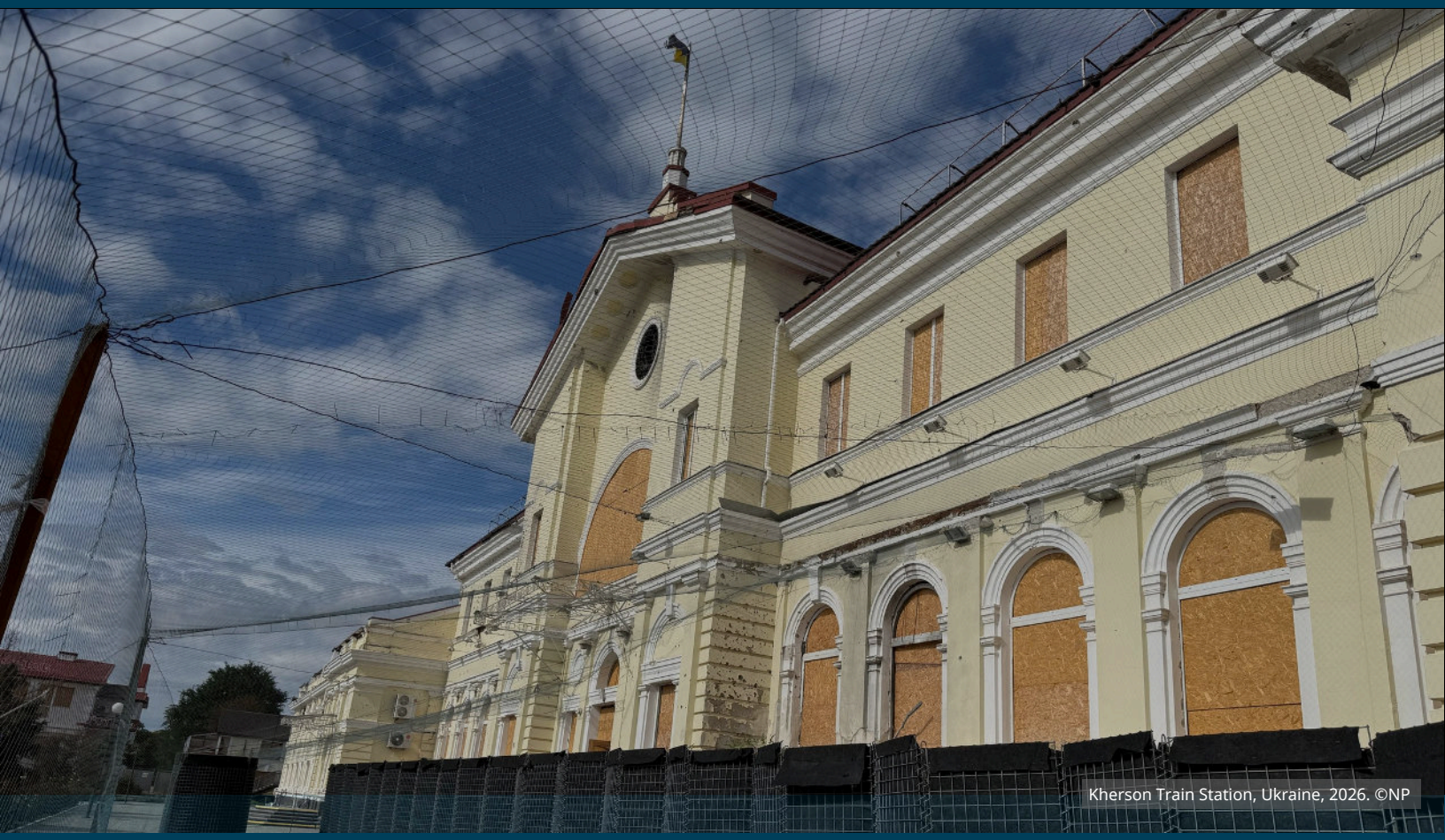
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Kherson Train Station, Ukraine, 2026. ©NP

Kherson Evacuation Train:

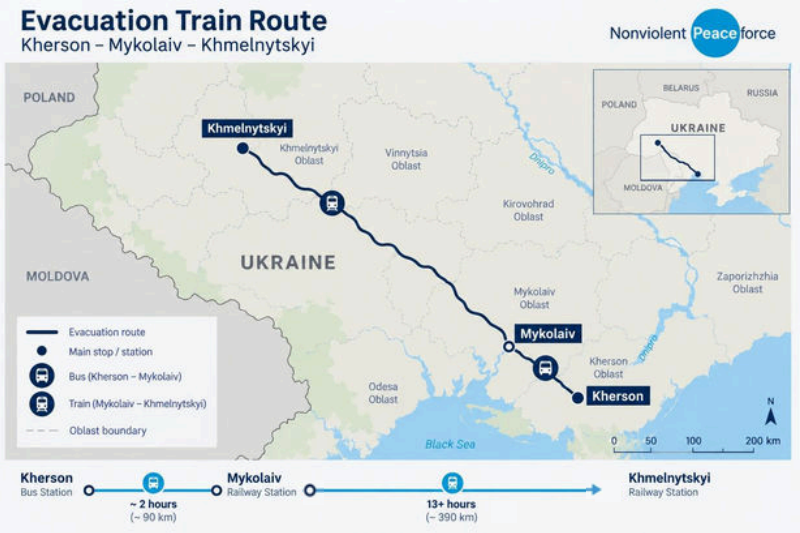
Civilian Journey Overview and Protection Gaps

Nonviolent Peaceforce

September **2026**

Background

The Kherson regional authorities, in partnership with Ukrainian Railways (Ukrzaliznytsia), provide a free evacuation train service for residents from Khersonska oblast to Khmelnytskyi in western Ukraine. This train has been running since 2022, however, recent attacks on railway infrastructure have changed the process for taking this train and the associated logistics.



Recent monitoring visits conducted by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) between 18 and 24 September brought to light several significant protection gaps that exist along this evacuation route. These gaps may disproportionately affect people with specific protection and assistance needs, including older persons, persons with disabilities and reduced mobility, women and children, people traveling alone, and individuals with limited financial or social support.

The absence of continuous support, safe reception arrangements, and accessible information may also expose evacuees to gender-, age-, and disability-specific protection risks throughout the journey.

During the period surveyed, 9 persons utilized the evacuation train across four departure dates on 18, 20, 22, and 24 September. With winter approaching and local authorities urging residents to leave, evacuations are already rising and further increases are expected as the weather turns colder.

The current evacuation process requires civilians to navigate multiple locations and transfers with limited information, assistance, and continuity of support between each stage of the journey. The following brief summarizes the current evacuation process, identifies key protection gaps, and proposes urgent actions to strengthen support for civilians along this key displacement corridor.

Evacuation Route

Recent attacks and damage to rail lines have disrupted direct train service to and from Kherson. As a result, evacuees now travel by road from Kherson to Mykolaiv where they board the evacuation train to Khmelnytskyi. The train runs every even day of the month, with one carriage reserved for Kherson evacuees. The Kherson OVA operates a hotline where potential evacuees can receive information about this evacuation route.



Kherson Bus Station, Ukraine, 2026. ©NP

Registration and Departure from Kherson

Individuals leaving Kherson through the evacuation train are required to present themselves in person at the bus station for registration from 11:00am on the day of departure. Previously, registration took place at the Kherson train station, after which evacuees were required to arrange their own transportation to the bus station. This created an unnecessary protection risk, as the train station is classified as critical infrastructure and is located in a dangerous area. It also required evacuees to independently arrange transportation between the two locations, which is particularly challenging for PWLM and elderly civilians.

Following recommendations from Nonviolent Peaceforce, the local administration shifted the registration process to the bus station as of 18 September, eliminating the need for evacuees to travel to the train station.

After registering, authorities provide the physical registration documents to one member of the evacuating group. Authorities also call the Khmelnytskyi OVA to inform them about the evacuees that will arrive. The only partner operating at the Kherson bus station is the Red Cross, which provides medical support to evacuees as requested.

Transfer from Kherson to Mykolaiv

Previously, Ukrainian Railways (Ukrzaliznytsia) arranged transportation from Kherson to Mykolaiv. However, as of 18 September, this is no longer the case. Local authorities now coordinate with local humanitarian organizations to provide the transfer.

Local partners pick up evacuees from the Kherson bus station between 12:00 and 12:30 and drop them off at the Mykolaiv train station, where they wait for the train to Lviv (which stops in Khmelnytskyi) departing at 14:09.

Layover in Mykolaiv

Upon arrival at Mykolaiv train station, evacuees wait for the train to Khmelnytskyi. While waiting for transit, there is little support or information for civilians which leads to further risk exposures. A point of invincibility operates in the train station and offers tea and water but no food or heating.

There is also limited evidence of structured communication between the authorities coordinating the evacuation from Kherson and personnel at the Mykolaiv train station. As a result, evacuees may arrive at the station without clear information about where to wait, how to access assistance, or what will happen during the next stage of their journey.

Arrival in Khmelnytskyi

The train arrives to Khmelnytskyi at 03:18 in the morning and the carriage carrying Kherson evacuees detaches before the train continues to Lviv.

Evacuees must wait in the station until approximately 08:00, when social workers arrive to transport them to collective housing. This leaves evacuees without a structured reception or assistance mechanism for approximately five hours during the early morning.

During this period, evacuees have limited access to food, water, heating, or other support services. While there is an invincibility point in the train station, it does not function as a reception point with a structured humanitarian presence for evacuees.

This creates a particularly significant protection concern for older people, people with reduced mobility, people traveling alone, and individuals who have limited resources to meet their basic needs independently.

Protection Gaps

Information Dissemination

There is little to no information provided to evacuees about the evacuation process itself or the next steps they will take upon arrival to Khmelnytskyi. At each stage of the evacuation process, civilians are provided with only enough information to reach their next location. Information is also only conveyed orally, increasing the chances of evacuees forgetting, misremembering, or receiving incomplete directives.

The bus station lacks proper signage pointing evacuees to the registration desk, which is located in the basement shelter. This may create additional difficulties for people unfamiliar with the location or for those who require assistance navigating the station.

Evacuees also reported receiving limited information about the transfer in Mykolaiv, who would meet them in Khmelnytskyi, where they would be accommodated once there, and what support would be available upon arrival.

Clear and timely information is particularly important given that the evacuation journey now involves multiple locations, modes of transportation, and regional authorities. Without adequate information, civilians may be unable to make informed decisions or independently navigate the journey safely.



Kherson Bus Station, Ukraine, 2026. ©NP

Case Management and Humanitarian Support

Currently, there are no partners or social workers providing case management support to evacuees. Individuals complete the journey largely on their own with limited access to assistance between departure from Kherson and reception in Khmelnytskyi.

This presents significant protection risks for people with specific protection and assistance needs, including older persons, persons with disabilities or reduced mobility, women and children traveling alone or with dependents, and people with limited financial or social support.

One individual interviewed departed Kherson with only 60 UAH (approximately $1.35). He had no food, water, or medicine and no ability to procure these items for himself during the journey. Furthermore, no partners were present along the displacement corridor to support any of these needs.

The lack of basic support also creates risks for evacuees who may experience an unexpected delay, miss a connection, lose contact with their group, or arrive without sufficient resources to meet their immediate needs. The journey takes over 21 hours (from 11:00am to 8:00am the following day) and no food is available at any point.

Support for Specific Protection Needs

The current evacuation process does not systematically identify or address gender- and age-specific protection needs. Long transit times, limited humanitarian presence, and overnight waiting periods may increase protection risks for women and children, particularly those traveling alone or with dependants.

The five-hour overnight wait in Khmelnytskyi should also be considered from a safety, dignity and GBV risk mitigation perspective, including adequate lighting, privacy, safe sanitation facilities, and access to confidential referral pathways.

Coordination Along the Evacuation Route

There is limited coordination and information sharing between actors responsible for different stages of the evacuation journey.

Namely, there is currently no established communication mechanism between Kherson authorities coordinating the evacuation and personnel at Mykolaiv railway station. The fact that registration documents are handed physically to one member of the evacuating party opens the door to potential loss or misplacement.

This means that information about who is traveling, their specific needs, and their expected arrival may not consistently reach the actors responsible for supporting evacuees at the next stage.

Improved communication between Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Khmelnytskyi would allow actors to anticipate arrivals, identify people requiring additional assistance, and ensure continuity of support throughout the journey.

Support for Persons with Low Mobility

The Mykolaiv train station has the capacity to support persons with low mobility, including with wheelchairs. However, the provision of these services depends on advance coordination with railway station staff, which was not observed in practice. Assistance boarding the train using a lift requires support from the Red Cross in Mykolaiv which is difficult to arrange on short notice.

It is unclear whether equivalent assistance is available when evacuees arrive in Khmelnytskyi.

The current process therefore does not provide a clearly established system for identifying and supporting persons with reduced mobility throughout the entire journey. Assistance may be available at individual points, but there is no clear indication that responsibility for supporting an individual is transferred from one stage of the journey to the next.

> *“We were on the platform from around 1 p.m. until 1 a.m. There wasn’t even a bench or anywhere to sit.”*
> *—An evacuee with reduced mobility*

Support for Evacuees Arriving in Khmelnytskyi

The evacuation train arrives in Khmelnytskyi at 3:18 in the morning. Evacuees must wait in the train station alone until 8:00 until social workers arrive to meet them.

During this period, evacuees are effectively left to wait independently within the railway station. While the station does have an invincibility point, basic humanitarian services are limited.

The absence of a structured reception mechanism during these hours may create additional safety, dignity and accessibility concerns, particularly for women and children, older persons, persons with disabilities or reduced mobility, and people traveling alone or with limited support networks.

Recommendations

Establish Transit and Reception Points

Transit and reception points should be set up in the train stations in Mykolaiv and Khmelnytskyi with minimum humanitarian standards in place to protect people's dignity and privacy. These points should be equipped with heating, water, food, informational materials, charging facilities and basic communication support, access to sanitary facilities, and a clear



Kherson Bus Station, Ukraine, 2026. ©NP

referral mechanism for people requiring additional assistance.

Specifically, support should be in place for evacuees arriving in Khmelnytskyi in the early hours of the morning.

Establish Humanitarian Presence and Case Management at Transit Points

Humanitarian partners should be present at key transit points in the Kherson bus station and Mykolaiv and Khmelnytskyi train stations.

These partners should establish clear mechanisms for providing or referring evacuees to medical, protection, accommodation, transportation, legal, and other assistance. Especially with trains frequently delayed for hours on end, coordinated support is required at transit points to support a lengthy evacuation journey.

This would help ensure continuity of support throughout the journey and allow people with specific protection needs to be identified early and referred to appropriate services.

Strengthen Information Provision

Clear information should be provided to evacuees before starting the journey. This should include an overview of the evacuation process, how long the journey will take, what evacuees should bring with them, where to register, what to expect upon arrival, and contact information for relevant authorities and humanitarian partners.

Clear signage should also be installed at the Kherson bus station to direct evacuees to the registration point.

Establish a Communication Mechanism Between Transit Points

Kherson authorities should be in communication with Mykolaiv railway station personnel. Evacuation partners supporting transit between Kherson and Mykolaiv should be integrated into this mechanism as a key coordination link.

At a minimum, this mechanism should allow relevant actors to know how many evacuees are traveling, their expected arrival time, and whether additional assistance should be arranged in advance. Any sharing of personal or sensitive information should follow appropriate data protection and confidentiality safeguards.

This would create greater continuity of care and reduce the risk of individuals being left without assistance during transfers.

Ensure Protections for Persons with Low Mobility

Dedicated personnel and resources should exist at both Mykolaiv and Khmelnytskyi train stations to support persons with low mobility, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups. This includes access to wheelchairs, assistance with baggage, support navigating the station, and assistance embarking onto the train.

Where possible, individuals requiring assistance should be identified before departure from Kherson so that support can be arranged in advance and responsibility can be transferred between actors along the route (see above).