



Nonviolent
Peaceforce

БІБЛІОТЕКА

KHARKIV SNAPSHOT

Civilian Protection Needs & Priorities
September 2022 Update

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01 Background

On 6 September 2022, the Ukrainian military launched a counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region. In just a few days more than 8,000 square kilometers of territory previously under occupation by Russian forces were reclaimed. At the time of reporting, Ukrainian forces has de-occupied more than 300 villages and settlements. The real figure is expected to be almost twice as significant.

In response, Ukrainian authorities, emergency services, and volunteer collectives have re-established a working presence in the recently de-occupied territories within Kharkiv Oblast. One of their priorities has been to prepare cities and villages for the fast-approaching winter. These actions are taking place in the context of intensified, retaliatory shelling by the Russian forces, as also seen along the southern Kherson contact line.



Following these developments, Nonviolent Peaceforce Ukraine (NPUA) conducted a visit to Kharkiv city with the purpose of identifying civilian protection concerns, completing actor/service mapping (inclusive of local volunteer collectives and national NGOs), and analyzing urgent humanitarian needs in recently de-occupied territories. This Snapshot builds on the initial rapid protection assessment conducted in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv earlier in May of 2022 and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with civilians and local humanitarians directly impacted by the conflict, as well as relevant government and military authorities.



DE-OCCUPIED AREAS

Ukrainian forces have de-occupied more than 8,000 square kilometers.



SETTLEMENTS

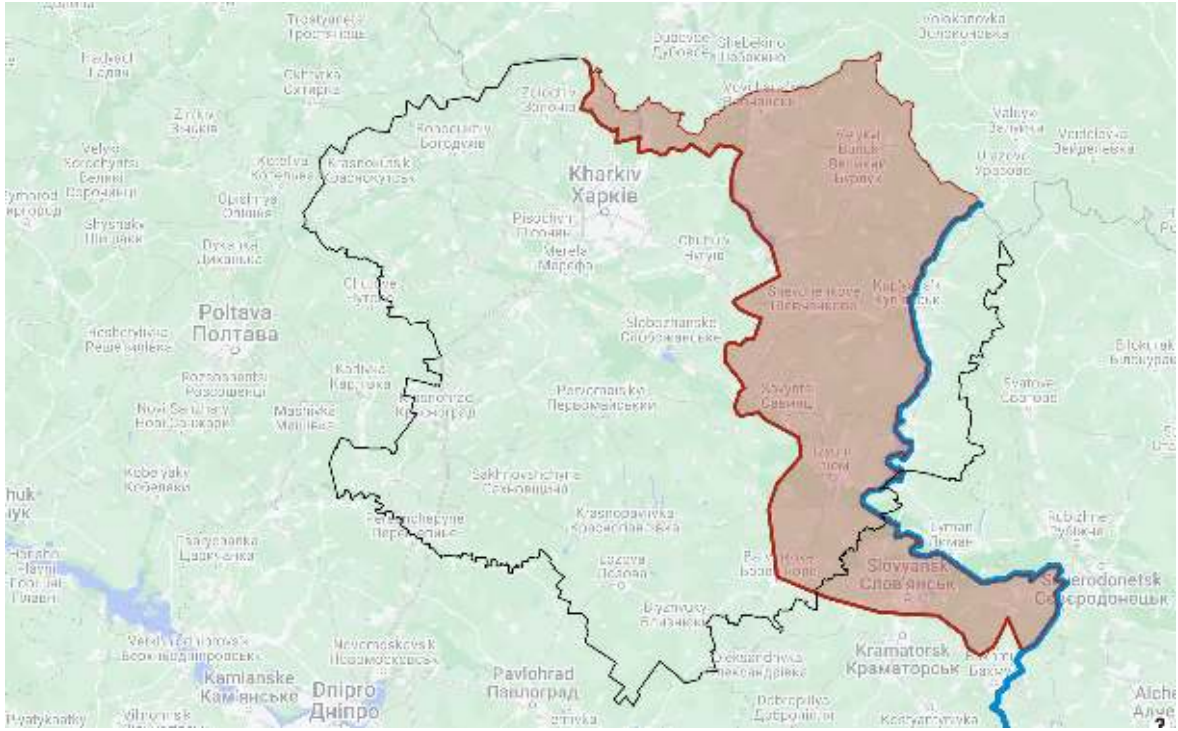
More than 300 villages and settlements have been recaptured.








LANDMINES

The recently de-occupied territories remain heavily mined.

02 Geographic Scope



MAP LEGEND

-  De-occupied areas; September counter-offensive
- 
-  Kharkiv Oblast border
-  Pre-September counter-offensive contact line
-  Post-September counter-offensive contact line

03 Protection Needs

Civilian Evacuations

Following the recapture of nearly all of the Kharkiv region by Ukrainian forces, local volunteer collectives are conducting civilian evacuations from the newly de-occupied territories to the city of Kharkiv and further west. This is in response to increased humanitarian need as a result of occupation, a lack of available services, and an increase in hostilities along the new contact line. Despite the leading role of local actors in these frontline efforts, the vast majority of resources remain concentrated with international agencies. Although some of the local humanitarian organizations interviewed by NP have partnered with international actors to receive funding to conduct such operations, more support is needed.

Civilian evacuations are overseen by the Kharkiv Civil Protection Office and carried out in coordination with local volunteer collectives and NGOs, military administration, and other relevant authorities. Populations exposed to specific protection risks, such as patients of institutional facilities, who require specialized medical and psychological support have been prioritized for evacuation from de-occupied areas. The capacity of the Oblast to accommodate evacuees has been limited, particularly in relation to civilians with special needs as medical facilities are understaffed and overwhelmed.

Currently, evacuations are being operated on an ad-hoc, per request basis and, for the most part, are facilitated within 24 to 36 hours of the request being received by relevant authorities. Although coordinated by the Oblast, many of these evacuations are carried out by local response mechanisms and volunteer collectives. This is in part due to limited government capacity, but also due to increased volumes of requests and the significant need for civilians to relocate to safer locations.

Support in the form of additional transportation, operational costs (fuel and driver stipends), as well as protective accompaniments by humanitarian organisations, and embedding safeguarding and do no harm consideration into responses, would help facilitate a greater number and safer approach to civilian evacuations. Considering the scale of need and the number of settlements recently de-occupied from the Russian forces, NP foresees a scaling up of protective accompaniments to ensure civilians reach their preferred destinations safely and receive necessary wraparound services thereafter in the form of temporary housing, essential humanitarian aid, and required medical services.

Access to MHPSS and Post-Incident SGBV Services

As the invasion in Ukraine passes over 200th days, evidence of severe mental health needs continues to emerge. Civilians in recently de-occupied settlements had to spend months in shelters, make-shift basements, and have been traumatized by the war – physically and/or emotionally. Within Kharkiv city, metro stations are being used as long-term accommodation for residents regardless of their shelter status. Volunteers and local civil society organizations that had been on the forefront of the humanitarian response continue reporting cases of burnout and cumulative stress.

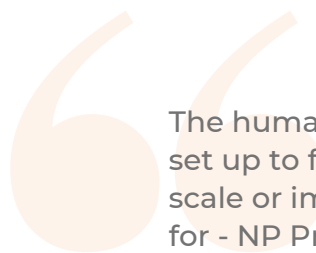
In the areas that have been hotspots for hostilities or under occupation of the Russian forces, civilians are struggling to cope with prolonged stress and trauma and have almost no access to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Patients with chronic illnesses have been rapidly deteriorating without access to care or medication over the prolonged period. Addressing mental health concerns is a priority, including post-incident sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) care. Provision of adequate emergency support – e.g., sitting down with someone and listening to their story, creating awareness of available services, providing someone with information on the common signs, symptoms, and reactions to stress, and, when necessary, referring them to specialized services – needs to be ensured in real-time, while continuing strengthening and establishing new referral pathways.

Further, reports of SGBV in the de-occupied areas have been increasing as local service providers regain access. Similar to territories de-occupied north of Kyiv in April, women in the Kharkiv region have experienced significant levels of conflict-related sexual violence. Understanding the scale of this issue is complicated by cultural stigmatization and a lack of actively operating women's clinics.

Mine Clearance

There is ongoing and widespread risk to civilians in de-occupied areas and other areas of Kharkiv regularly exposed to shelling related to unexploded ordnance (UXO). There is strong evidence showing that the Russian forces have commonly used cluster munitions throughout the Oblast, as well as relied on older soviet-era ERWs which are often faulty and do not detonate on impact. Further, it was noted by authorities in Kharkiv that in the recently de-occupied areas, civilian infrastructure and civilian areas have been booby-trapped with victim operated explosive devices. Oblast and military responses are working to support this but have limited capacity. INGO and UN demining mechanisms are not yet operational in these areas due to security risks to technical staff.

There is an urgent need to increase teams for manual and mechanized mine clearance in the de-occupied areas and agree on joint educational campaigns for Kharkiv citizens. The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continues to threaten not only civilian lives but restricts access to some areas and the urgently needed delivery of humanitarian aid. In the city of Balakliya, for instance, landmines are reported in public spaces affecting civilians and their already depleted resources. There is also a significant number of surrounding forests that remain mined, which hinders access to firewood, a source of heating and cooking for residents.



The humanitarian response, and the coordination systems set up to facilitate service delivery are not working on the scale or immediacy that on the ground realities are calling for - NP Programme Advisor

05 Winterization

The restoration of housing and critical infrastructure damaged as a result of the Russian invasion is an urgent issue for Kharkiv citizens. Following the ongoing Russian military campaign in Kharkiv and the region, combined heat and power plants were damaged, which need to be restored before the onset of winter temperatures. At the time of reporting, some residents of Kharkiv Oblast were still without electricity. There have been cuts in water supplies as well.

Within Kharkiv city, local NGO and volunteer collectives are working to support civilian shelter rehabilitation and insulation (for example, Youth Council, and We Are Brothers, We Are Ukrainians, which is part of the Help Kharkiv humanitarian hub). However, resources and staff to address the population on scale are insufficient. Surrounding areas and locations closer to the contact line are further vulnerable due to the high levels of damage, reduced access to resources and limited logistics and the number of actors accessing these areas.

This presents an urgent humanitarian issue. Emergency services and local volunteer collectives need sustained supplies of required materials to rehabilitate schools, hospitals, housing, as well as water and electricity supply networks in the de-occupied territories. Sustained supply of electricity and gas is expected to be interrupted due to ongoing shelling – static site generators and water trucking are required to support reconstruction efforts on the ground. The current response from the international community has been limited, and the perception from local actors is that international actors have monopolized available local materials, and that they are holding this supply in warehouses rather than accelerating distribution. This creates difficulties for local procurement and distribution of said materials by local actors with the most ready access to communities.



Recommendations



SMALL-SCALE GRANTS

Provide rapid small-scale grants to volunteer collectives and local civil society organizations conducting civilian evacuations.



MOBILE TEAMS

Set up mobile teams to support civilian evacuations and help address immediate needs.



MINE CLEARANCE

Advocate and resource mine clearance and dissemination of mine education and self-protection strategies.



WINTERIZATION

Rapidly scale up the provision of static generators, water trucking, and winterization resources to recently de-occupied areas.

NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE UKRAINE

NP is currently operational in North East and South of Ukraine focusing on supporting local volunteer collectives with continuing their humanitarian efforts while advocating for the protection needs of civilians within Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv Oblasts.