



A YEAR INTO RUSSIA'S RENEWED MILITARY OFFENSIVE IN UKRAINE

CIVILIAN PROTECTION NEEDS
& RESPONSES IN DE-OCCUPIED &
FRONTLINE TERRITORIES

Kharkiv - Kherson - Mykolaiv



PHOTO: We Are Brothers, We Are Ukrainians/Kharkiv/2022

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PHOTO: NP/Joachim Kleinmann/
Oleksandrivka, Kherson/2023

BACKGROUND

As Russia's renewed military offensive in Ukraine marks one year anniversary this month, attacks on civilians, first responders, as well as critical civilian infrastructure across Ukraine continue. These attacks further exacerbate an already acute protection crisis - older people, people with special needs, rural communities, and children remain at high risk of harm. Although international actors have re-established their presence in Ukraine as of early 2022, the bulk of humanitarian response in de-occupied and frontline areas continue to be carried out by local NGO and informal volunteer networks with little external support.

In Kherson and Kharkiv, for the last months civilians have been facing daily shelling and missile attacks with frequent civilian casualties. Hostilities show no signs of abating and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Although aid has begun to reach urban centres and larger hromadas following de-occupation, it is not reaching people exposed to higher vulnerabilities – namely, people

with special needs, older people, and those in underserved, harder-to-reach communities. Civilians in rural areas continue to face widespread impacts caused by a year of relentless hostilities and, in some territories, months of occupation by Russian forces. Although Ukrainian emergency utility crews have been doing unseen work to swiftly restore civilian access to electricity, water, heating, and gas in de-occupied and frontline areas, ongoing shelling and logistical constraints, caused by damage to roads and bridges, limit access to affected settlements. Attacks on Ukrainian civil infrastructure continue to impact a great number of already underserved communities.

This snapshot builds on Nonviolent Peaceforce Ukraine (NPUA) ongoing monitoring of civilian protection needs and concerns in de-occupied and frontline areas in south and north of Ukraine, and an earlier protection assessment conducted in Kherson, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv, where NPUA has a static presence, and provides unarmed protection to civilians, including local volunteer collectives.



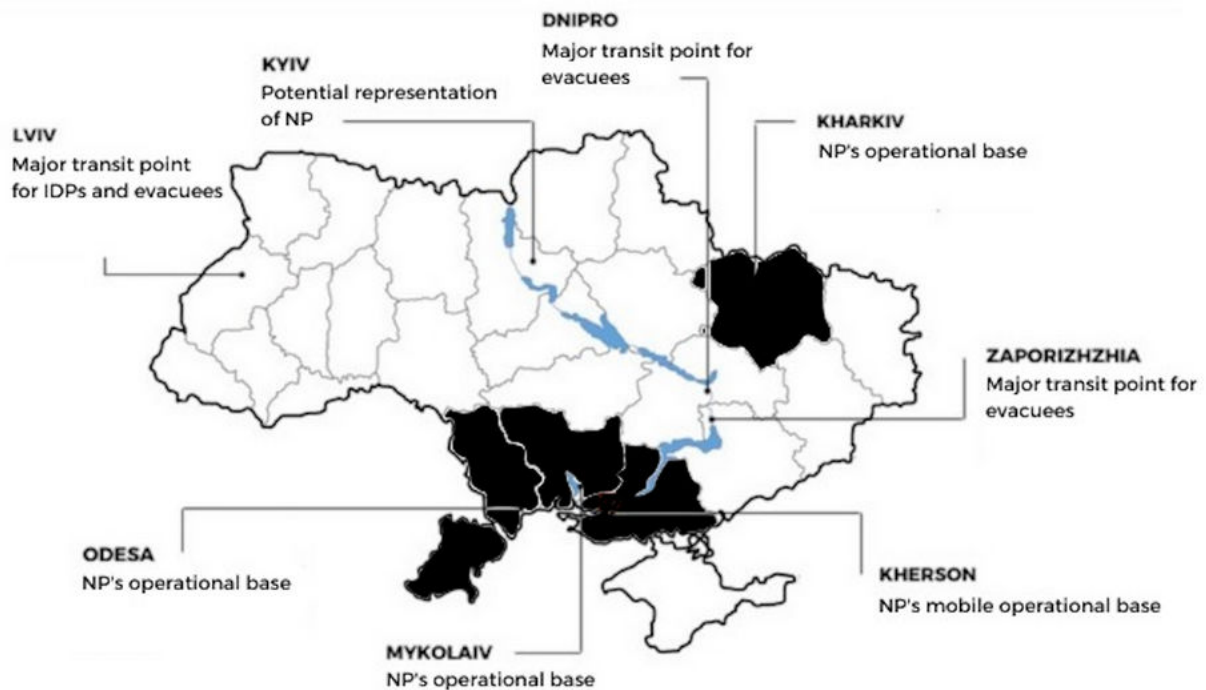
PHOTO: We Are Brothers, We Are Ukrainians/Kramatorsk/2023

CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS IN DE-OCCUPIED AND FRONTLINE AREAS

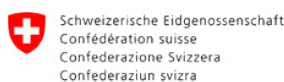
As civilians cope with prolonged exposure to intense hostilities and limited access to basic services, many continue to move away from de-occupied and frontline areas. Others have been pushed to come back to their homes, despite the fact that these locations remain unsafe. As of early 2023, access to long-term accommodation and sufficient financial support remains one of the major challenges for civilians who wish to evacuate or seek temporary shelter in the areas of displacement. Additionally, lack of availability of space in geriatric facilities and hospices in areas neighbouring de-occupied and frontline locations, cause a further delay in evacuating older people and people with special needs.

Kharkiv

Despite consistent shelling, winter cold, and limited access to services, Kharkiv inhabitants have been gradually returning to the city. According to local authorities, as of beginning of 2023, the city's population has increased to 1.1 m people, nearly reaching the pre-war population of 1.4 m residents. In Ukraine's northern territories, civilians from de-occupied cities of Izyum, Kupyansk, and Vovchansk have been evacuating to Kharkiv city in search of protection and essential services. Over the last month, local volunteer groups have also noted a sharp increase in requests



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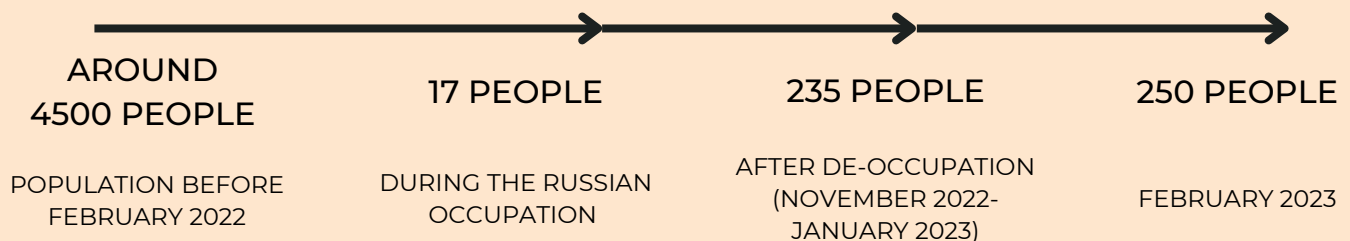
for civilian evacuations from Kupyansk and Vovchansk as Russian forces have re-launched several offensives in the region. In February 2023, around 100 people had been evacuated from these areas on a daily basis - a stark increase when compared to previous weeks. This trend is expected to continue as Russia's regional offensive continues to escalate.

Kherson

In Kherson, civilian evacuations via formal and informal routes have slowed down. As of February 2023, Kherson authorities in cooperation with Ukrainian Railways (Ukrzaliznytsia) continue to provide one train car, free of charge, on a passenger train from Kherson to Khmelnytskyi each day - a decrease from four train cars provided in December. Ad-hoc evacuations by public transport, private transport, as well as volunteer and NGO transportation also continue. The Kherson train station has been targeted several times in recent weeks, resulting in an increase of informal evacuation modalities to Mykolaiv and other transit locations, from where residents often choose to continue their travels on evacuation trains. The Kherson station services have been re-established quickly but NP anticipates coordination and capacity challenges to emerge in future. In the meantime, returns, particularly to de-occupied villages further away from the frontline, have accelerated.

Returns to Kherson city have also been observed, despite a deteriorating security situation that continues to pose threats to civilians. Access to safe shelters is extremely limited with only few residents having adequate relocation options. Within the first month of 2023, NP observed busier streets with more people and cars accessing markets when comparing to late 2022. Kherson Train Station management also noted an increase in the number of returnees arriving to Kherson city by train from central and north of Ukraine.

CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS IN POSAD-POKROVS'KE VILLAGE, KHERSON



Mykolaiv

According to local authorities, an estimated 100,000 people have returned to Mykolaiv city as of January 2023. Concurrently, civilians from Ochakiv, a port hromada that has been under constant heavy shelling by the Russian forces, have also been relocating to Mykolaiv city. As the frontline has moved further away in November 2022, Mykolaiv city is now considered a safer place by civilians.

Civilian population movements have also increased from Mykolaiv city to surrounding territories. In Shevchenkivka hromada, civilian population has increased from 700 to 1000 people within a month. Meanwhile in Novohrihorivka, a village almost fully destroyed by hostilities, civilians have been commuting daily to Mykolaiv city in order to gain access to material aid.

NP continues to work directly with local authorities and community groups to disseminate information regarding services available in the areas of transit and reception. This has been inclusive of the development of multi-sectoral teams at transit hubs as well as information booklets dedicated to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). NP teams in Mykolaiv and Odesa have been providing regular protective presence at train and bus stations to support civilians on the move.

PROTECTION NEEDS

Physical Threats to Civilians Safety

Safe and accessible shelters in de-occupied and frontline areas remain unavailable to majority of civilians. While in rural areas, buildings with underground shelters or bunkers are hard to come by, in cities conditions at such shelters are not suitable for even temporary stay. Rehabilitation of shelters in frontline areas was identified as a priority by the Government of Ukraine but little progress has been made so far. In Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv, civilians report to NP that public shelters are often locked and, therefore, inaccessible in the event of a sudden bombardment. With ongoing daily attacks by the Russian forces, a lack of available and easily accessible shelters poses a major risk to civilians' safety.

The resilience points – mostly cloth tent structures installed in public places where civilians can access electricity, heating, and mobile or internet connectivity – provide little to no protection from shelling or other threats faced by civilians. Often located close to or inside of government buildings, these points have repeatedly come under fire.

In Kherson specifically, the Air Raid Sirens, a loud warning system that notifies people of imminent threats and calls residents to seek shelter, is currently being re-installed months after Russian forces, retreating from Kherson, looted and destroyed alarm equipment, including loudspeakers, across the city centre and the 17 de-occupied hromadas. As of February 2023, the Air Raid Sirens have been tested but remain non-operational.

In Kharkiv, Kherson and Mykolaiv, the Government de-mining emergency teams have been working tirelessly to clear critical infrastructure, public spaces, and people's home from UXOs and booby traps. The process of de-mining has been slow due to a lack of available staff and equipment, high associated costs, and the scale of contamination. Land mines and UXOs continue to pose a high risk to civilian safety in these areas such as Shevchenkove hromada in Mykolaiv where NP team saw farmers working in the fields disregarding signs of explosives. In the first weeks of 2023, there have been several reports of UXO/ERW-related civilian casualties as residents were tending to agricultural land surrounding Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Kharkiv cities.



PHOTO: NP/Sarah Hamdy/
Svevchenkove, Mykolaiv/2023

Access to Humanitarian Aid and Disruption of Essential Services

As of early 2023, civilians continue to face disruption of essential services caused by a year of hostilities and months of occupation. In many locations access to aid remains challenging.

Although some of utilities and civil services have been restored in certain settlements, widespread access to such services remains limited and unstable. Ongoing hostilities, high presence of UXOs and mines, along with logistical constraints make it challenging for emergency repair crews to reach all affected areas. As a result, humanitarian aid is not reaching people exposed to vulnerabilities, leaving some communities completely cut off from access to essential services.

For example, In Blahodatne village, civilians have seen some of the worst shelling in Mykolaiv oblast. Today, the 10 families that still reside there remain unreachable by aid agencies since the only bridge leading to them has been damaged. In Kherson, settlements along the Dnipro River are not being reached by humanitarian aid agencies either. Given limited international presence across these territories, local collectives remain the dominant source of support for affected communities, often crowd sourcing resources like fuel and vehicles in order to sustain their operations and administer available aid.

"WE KNOW ABOUT THE MINES IN THE FIELDS BUT WE WILL FARM THE LAND ANYWAY. WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO WE HAVE? THIS IS OUR ONLY SOURCE OF INCOME"

- A FEMALE RESIDENT OF POSAD-POKROVS'KE, KHERSON

Recent changes undertaken by international aid agencies in regards to selection of those eligible to receive aid and the format of aid distribution - moving from blanket distribution to provision of aid to selected beneficiaries based on vulnerability criteria - have been poorly communicated to communities with little guidance given on new requirements and expected timeline for accessing aid distributions. This has had an impact on civilians' ability to access aid with dignity and has exacerbated existing tensions between local authorities, through which said aid is being disseminated and community members.

Additionally, limited support in the form of building materials (sealing off kits, rehabilitation materials) has been provided to communities on the outskirts of major cities. Some materials that had been shared remain unused due to a lack of relevant tools for shelter repair in both rural and urban areas. Struggling to find assistance, affected communities have found themselves unable to utilise emergency shelter materials like plywood and plastic sheeting provided by INGOs. This speaks to a general pattern where material support provided to communities is commonly incomplete rendering said materials impractical for purpose.

Attacks on healthcare facilities have also increased since the beginning of 2023, having a direct impact on people's ability to access medical care, particularly for people with chronic or other health conditions as war-wounded are being prioritised for medical treatment. In Kherson alone, at least 15 strikes had been executed on medical facilities, including the city's maternity hospital, children's hospital, the local Red Cross, and two ambulance stations, forcing already limited health services to diminish further.

There is evidence of Russian forces using the "double-tap" tactic throughout Kherson and Ukraine as a whole. This tactic aims to directly target first responders to increase the number casualties. In a hospital visited by NP, one doctor and nurse have been caring for nearly 50 patients admitted to the facility. In surrounding hromadas, people with health conditions, could sometimes wait for days before reaching and being admitted to a hospital, whereas other patients report being discharged back home prematurely to make space for the war-wounded. Although, pharmacies in Kherson are being reestablished, they are still under-supplied, when compared to needs, and are concentrated within the city center.

Child Protection

A year into the renewed Russia's offensive, the impact on children's physical and psychological wellbeing is widespread while child protection and support services remain limited. With social department operating at extremely limited capacity, it is challenging to understand the full scale and the scope of child protection concerns in these areas. In Kherson, the Department of Family, Children and Youth is experiencing severe shortages of trained staff, including mental health specialists. The center that provided psychosocial rehabilitation services to children had to close during the occupation and has not re-opened since. For children, including unaccompanied minors who are in need of protection, shelter and other support, the only available option is go to the police. Police officer then accompany them to a

local hospital where they are given shelter. Lastly, children continue to be socially isolated, which is particularly evident in hromadas outside of urban areas to which majority of young persons have fled prior escalation.

Ongoing risk of physical harm forces parents to keep their children indoors which has had significant long-term impacts on children's psychological and physical wellbeing. Unstable access to electricity, signal and internet prevents children from keeping up with their studies and staying in touch with friends and family. Protection of children with disabilities remains a distinct concern.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Protection and support services for survivors of SGBV, particularly outside of urban centers, remain limited. NP has learned of an instance of SGBV in one of the villages where survivors did not see a point in reporting the abuse as persons responsible for providing protection to survivors are often the abusers themselves. In urban areas, facilities like women's shelters, centers for mothers and children, day centers for survivors have all closed during the occupation. Similarly to other community resources, such facilities have been damaged or looted by the occupying Russian forces, while other facilities lack trained staff to provide minimum standards of care.

For example, in Kherson, a director of social services said he would not allow his staff to work as they require psychosocial support in order to administer care to affected communities. In Izyum, Kharkiv, a shelter for SGBV survivors has been re-purposed to a collective center for IDPs arriving from Donetsk oblast, and as such the services are no longer available to residents. Access to post-incident support could be found



in only a few urban hospitals and limited OB-GYN offices. Survivors often struggle accessing available services due to a lack of information, limited physical means and financial challenges.

Protection of LGBTQ+ People

Members of LGBTQ+ community are distinctly marginalised and exposed to vulnerabilities particularly in rural and frontline areas. LGBTQ+ people do not have equal access to humanitarian assistance when compared to other members of affected communities, and reports have been received by NP that LGBTQ+ persons receive only what is left from humanitarian distributions. While instances of SGBV and homophobia are high within such communities when compared to the general population, these events are often under reported due to community stigma and fear of retaliation.

Protection of the Elderly and People with Special Needs

People with special needs and older people continue to be overlooked by the aid sector, leaving them unable to meet their needs with dignity. While their mental health status and ability to cope steadily deteriorates, reports have been received by caretakers of negative coping strategies like abuse of alcohol and other harmful practices.



PHOTO: NP/JOACHIM KLEINMANN/
POSAD-POKROVS'KE/2022

URGENT ACTION

- Increase the accessibility and safety of bomb shelters, re-locate resilience points to safer areas, and scale up mine awareness education for adults and children.
- Increase support to and protection of first responders and frontline volunteers by ensuring access to mental health services, first aid trainings, and provision of adequate first aid kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Create effective localised coordination platforms between INGOs, local response mechanisms, and relevant local authorities to strengthen humanitarian response and referral pathways.
- Increase support and guidance of international agencies to local implementing partners to ensure safeguarding and humanitarian principles are upheld by providers of aid.
- Begin livelihood support in de-occupied and frontline areas to prevent people from resorting to harmful practices such as farming fields contaminated with mines.
- Provide material support specific to individual and community needs in consideration of the impact it may have on the local markets.
- Scale up mental health support services for volunteers, first responders, and emergency crews conducting critical infrastructure repairs.
- Ensure people with disabilities and older people have dignified access to aid.