

© Nonviolent Peaceforce; Transit shelter in Kramatorsk

SAFE SHELTER, DIGNIFIED LIVES

Living Conditions in the Areas of Internal Displacement and Their Impact on Civilian Safety

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BACKGROUND

Years of large-scale ongoing displacement, housing destruction, and inaccessibility caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, have created a severe housing crisis across the country. As of January 2026, approximately **3.7 million people have been forced to leave their homes and are currently displaced inside Ukraine**, according to the United Nations estimate.[1] Mandatory evacuations remain ongoing across frontline and border regions, affecting hundreds of settlements. Evacuation orders have been frequently issued in response to escalating insecurities and shifting frontlines, resulting in highly dynamic civilian population movements. Many individuals face repeated displacement, including instances of premature returns to areas of origin followed by further evacuations due to deteriorating security conditions and/or limited access to safe and dignified long-term accommodation in areas of displacement.

Widespread and ongoing damage to civilian housing and infrastructure has significantly reduced the availability of safe and dignified shelters across the country, but particularly in frontline regions. A notable proportion of the housing stock is either destroyed, damaged, or in-accessible due to Russia's temporary occupation or annexation.[2] In addition, many housing units are uninhabitable due to structural damage or disrupted essential services, including electricity, water, and heating.

As a result, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often reliant on rental housing, temporary shelters or shared accommodations, which frequently offer sub-standard and short-term housing solutions that increase vulnerability, including to exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence, and compromise long-term stability and effective integration. Limited access to safe, dignified, and long-term accommodation also shapes decisions related to evacuation and return. Some civilians delay or refuse evacuation due to concerns over living conditions in displacement, while others prematurely return to unsafe areas of origin via high-risk routes, exposing themselves to additional protection risks as a result.

Older persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals with limited mobility are among the most affected by the lack of access to dignified accommodation in areas of displacement. Many required adapted housing, accessible infra-structure, or round-the-clock support, including assisted living arrangements which are often insufficient or unavailable across shelters hosting IDPs. As a result, these groups face increased barriers to safe and adequate accommodation, undermining their dignity and increasing their vulnerability during displacement. These challenges may also discourage or prevent them from evacuating in the first place.

[1] *UNHCR Ukraine Situation Flash Update #85, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121361.*
[2] *Ukraine faces 'unprecedented housing crisis', https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166360.*

DIGNIFIED ACCOMMODATION

What it is and why does it matter?



Dignified accommodation for IDPs and evacuees **goes beyond temporary shelter by ensuring living conditions that provide protection, safety, privacy, autonomy, as well as access to essential services and assistance**. This is especially important for older persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals with limited mobility, who often face barriers to evacuation and adapted housing.
In the context of Ukraine, where displacement has become protracted for over four years, dignity in displacement increasingly depends on access to long-term, adequate accommodation that supports stability and self-reliance. In the absence of such accommodation, civilians are often left to choose between staying in conditions that compromise their dignity, well-being, safety and health, and premature returns to unsafe areas of origin.

© Nonviolent Peaceforce; Collective center in Chaikyne, Kherson

KEY PROTECTION RISKS AND CONCERNS

Information gaps and decision-making on evacuation

A lack of clear, accurate and reliable information about living conditions and available assistance in areas of displacement significantly limits people's ability to make informed evacuation decisions. **Many civilians assume that no adequate shelter or support will be available upon arrival.**

This perception is particularly common among older people with limited travel experience, who may struggle to imagine life in a different environment. Without sufficient information and a sense of agency, evacuees are often unprepared for the decline in living standards after displacement. This highlights the need for better pre-evacuation communication and psychological preparation.

Disability certification as a barrier to evacuation and housing access

Access to adapted housing and support services in areas of displacement is often conditioned on possession of a disability certificate. In practice, this creates a major barrier for people with limited mobility and those requiring assisted living, particularly older persons whose mobility limitations are age-related and therefore not formally recognised.

The disability certification process is lengthy and difficult to access. It generally requires repeated inpatient treatment, referrals by a family doctor, and assessment by a medical and social commission before disability status and related benefit can be granted. In frontline areas, where medical and administrative systems are severely disrupted, this process is often non-functional. As a result, many people with clear mobility and care needs remain overlooked and unable to access evacuation support, adapted accommodation, social services and humanitarian assistance. Delays in obtaining certification can leave people without access to dignified housing in displacement areas, effectively preventing or delaying evacuation.

Older people face unique risks. Many are formally considered to have caregivers because they have living relatives, yet in practice they may be unsupported due to displacement, conscription, or the absence of family members. Without formal disability status or effective caregiving support, they often remain invisible to the social protection system.

In Kherson, following the city's de-occupation in 2022, many IDPs returned to their homes citing terrible living conditions in collective sites in Western Ukraine. This has discouraged people from leaving areas under intense shelling, even when mandatory evacuations are announced.

Conditions in collective shelters

Reception conditions in displacement areas are frequently substandard. Many collective shelters are in repurposed public buildings such as schools, kindergartens, dormitories, and other facilities not designed for long-term residential use.[3] While some adaptations have been made, achieving dignified and inclusive living conditions requires significant additional investment. Basic accessibility improvements may be possible, but structural barriers often remain, including the absence of elevators and mobility support infrastructure.

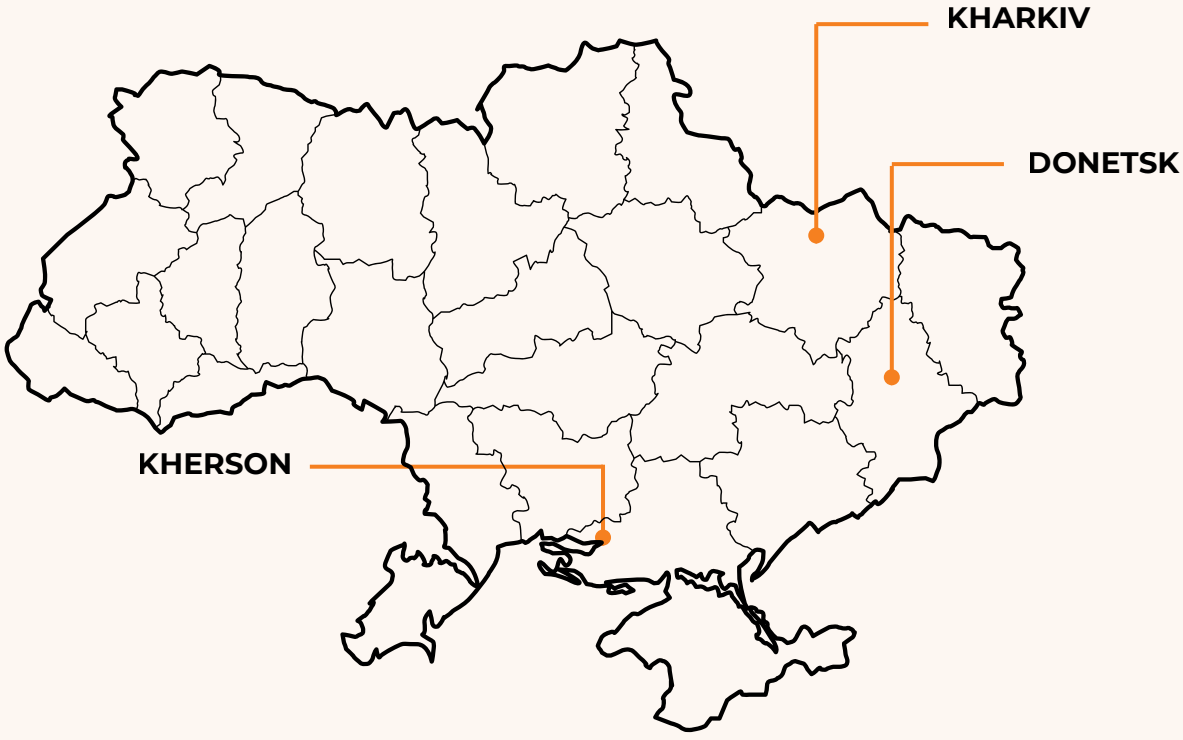
IDPs and evacuees residing in privately run informal collective centers face heightened protection risks due to the absence of oversight and independent monitoring, regulation and accountability mechanisms. Informal arrangements between IDPs and private landlords and shelter managers pose a risk of IDPs being invisible within a governmental and humanitarian systems, exposing them to increased risk of abuse, harassment, exploitation, violence, trafficking and forced eviction further undermining people's dignity and safety.

Assessment conducted between July and October 2025

NP teams visited 14 collective sites

Across 3 regions: Khersonska, Donetska, and Kharkivska

*Collective **sites closest to the frontline are often the least prioritised** in terms of repair and investment. Those who choose to stay in such sites – often elderly people or those with disabilities – suffer from damaged infrastructure and accessibility challenges.*



[3] *Collective Site(s) in Frontline Oblasts: Accessibility Assessment, https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Collective-sites-in-Frontline-Oblasts_Accessibility_2025.pdf.*

Privacy, affordability, and basic restriction

Collective living arrangements often reduce privacy and place pressure on family dynamics due to limited personal space. For many displaced civilians, private rental housing is not a viable alternative as government support and humanitarian assistance are often insufficient to cover rent and basic needs. In some shelters, restrictions such as prohibition on keeping animals also discourage evacuation.

Gaps in care for older people and persons with specific needs.

A critical challenge is the accommodation of older persons, persons with disabilities, individuals with limited mobility, and those requiring assisted living or palliative care. While some facilities can accommodate these groups, they require dedicated full-time care staff, which is rarely available on a sufficient scale. In some cases, older individuals were initially placed in palliative care facilities during earlier evacuation phases. However, as displacement has increased, available capacity has become insufficient, and there are limited alternative options for transferring earlier evacuees to appropriate care settings.

Mismatch between assigned housing location and people's capacities and needs

Civilians from rural areas may be placed in urban settings where they face difficulties adapting. While younger and employable individuals are sometimes accommodated in remote rural areas with limited access to jobs and educational opportunities as well as other child-support services.

Risk of unsafe return

Substandard living conditions, combined with insufficient financial means to access dignified housing, increase the risk of repeated displacement and unsafe returns to frontline or insecure risks. NP is aware of multiple cases of unsafe return across frontline regions, driven primarily by life without dignity in displacement and a lack of viable alternative housing options.

Denial of accommodation to people evacuating with pets

Many collective sites and state-run shelters in Ukraine restrict pets. While some designated transit centers allow them, many dormitories and communal shelters maintain strict no animals rules, discouraging people from evacuating and forcing many displaced pet owners to seek alternative housing.
The collective site in Zernove, Kharkiv, supported by NP through a sub-grant programme is a rare example where people are accepted with their pets.

> *After the stroke, I am unable to walk. It is difficult for me to even sit down or move around on my own without help. Because of the war, it is very difficult to receive treatment. It is scary to stay at home during shelling, especially when there is no light or heat. It is impossible to evacuate me without special transport and assistance, since I am a bedridden person - Galina from Kramatorsk*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Eligibility and access to dignified housing and assistance

The Government of Ukraine (GoU) should remove disability certification as a precondition for accessing evacuation, inclusive housing and care services. Instead, the needs of persons with limited mobility, chronic illnesses, and other care needs should be assessed in a rapid and flexible manner.

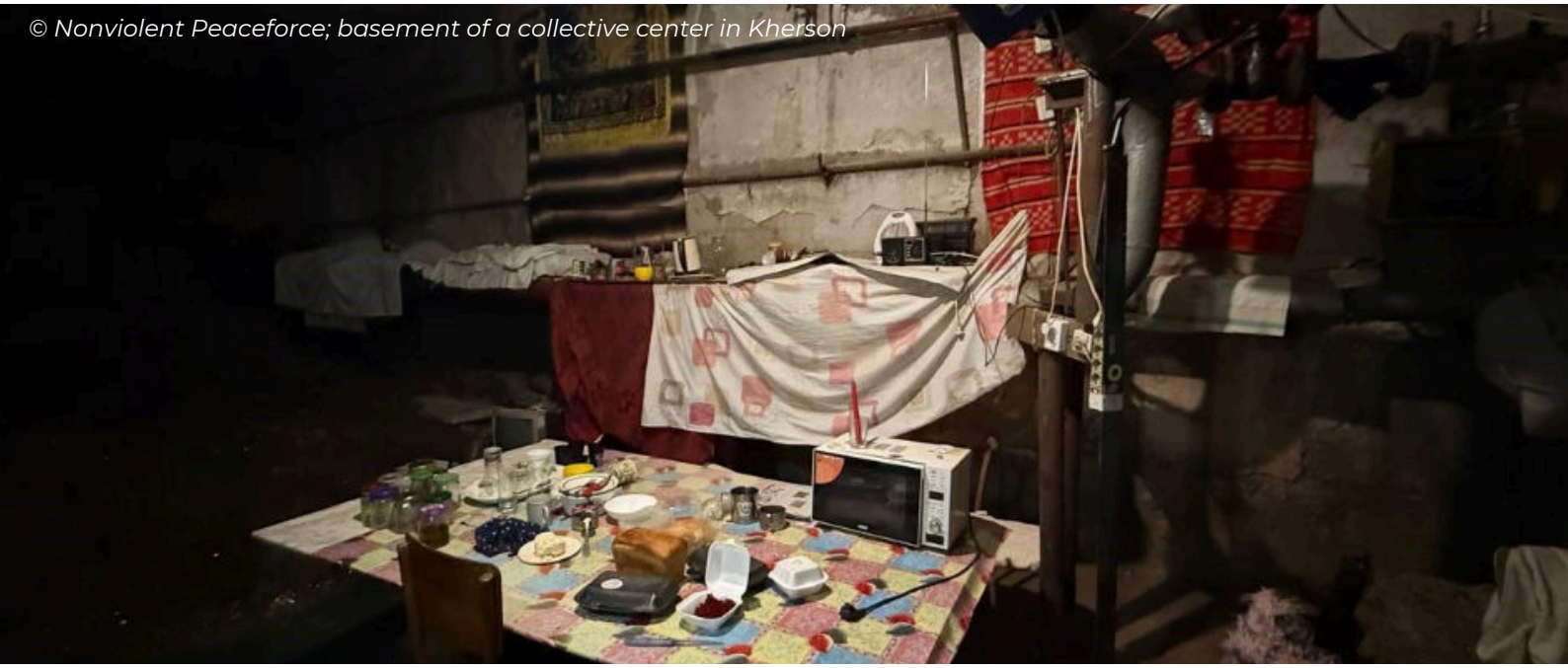
Disability certification procedures should be simplified and accelerated for conflict-affected persons.

Age-related dependency on care should also be recognised to ensure that older persons are not excluded from assistance based on the formal existence of relatives who may, in practice, be unavailable or unable to provide care.

Preparedness, information and decision-making before evacuation

Local authorities, supported by humanitarian actors, should improve pre-evacuation information and decision-making by providing accurate and clear information on available accommodation, living conditions and access to social services and humanitarian assistance in displacement areas.

Physiological preparedness and counselling should be integrated into evacuation planning to help civilians better understand and prepare for potential declines in living standards and broader life changes associated with displacement, reducing uncertainty and fear.



© Nonviolent Peaceforce; basement of a collective center in Kherson

Shelter accessibility, dignified conditions and placement quality

Housing placements should be better matched with people's needs and livelihoods.

Accessibility and protection standards in collective sites should be improved.

Both formal and informal (private) collective shelters should be systematically monitored to identify risks of exploitation, abuse, violence, and forced eviction, with particular attention to persons in heightened vulnerability who may otherwise be overlooked, with local authorities supported by regional and national authorities in addressing identified gaps and concerns.

Social services, protection, and outreach to persons with specific needs

Social welfare authorities, supported by humanitarian actors, should strengthening staffing, training, and protection tools for social service providers so they can deliver home-based care safely, improve referrals, and ensure continuity of care for displaced, persons with limited mobility, disability, and other specific needs.

Local and regional authorities should prioritise expanding outreach to identify and support isolated older persons, persons with disability, people with limited mobility, and those with other specific needs, ensuring dignified access to assistance and protection.

Long-term solutions

Cash assistance and support for dignified housing should be increased, and services for older persons, persons with disability, limited mobility, and those with other specific needs should be scaled up.

International donors and development actors should prioritise and increase investment in long-term housing and care solutions, moving beyond the provision of short-term shelter options.

Humanitarian and development responses should be better integrated connecting housing, social protection and employment and livelihoods opportunities to reduce protection risks, repeated displacement and premature returns to the areas of origins.

The war has made it more difficult to undergo treatment and rehabilitation. It is also difficult to carry food or water on your own. One of my hands is almost completely disabled, which makes it challenging for me to cook, clean, and take care of myself. After losing my husband and son, it has been very difficult morally - Larisa from Kramatorsk



WHAT ARE NP PARTNERS ALREADY DOING TO RESPOND?

Digital Tools for Evacuation, Accommodation, and Post-Evacuation Support

In March this year, **Relief Coordination Center (RCC)** launched a digital, post-evacuation monitoring system for IDPs, Poruch. Designed to provide transparent access to information on available housing options and improve coordination of frontline evacuations, the web-based platform maintains a unified registry of temporary accommodation facilities and enables the booking of places in collective sites. By providing real-time visibility of available accommodation and confirming placements before evacuation, the platform allows people to make informed decisions about whether to leave frontline areas exposed to constant attacks, with the assurance that safe accommodation will be available upon arrival.

The process begins when a person calls the hotline, allowing the call center operator to create an evacuation request and register basic personal information. Upon arrival at the chosen transit center, the person's registration is completed, and their longer-term accommodation needs are assessed. A booking request is then created and submitted to the selected collective site, where the site administrator reviews and either confirms or rejects the request. Once a placement is confirmed, transportation is arranged and the person is transferred to the collective site.
The person, therefore, receives timely, coordinated support at every stage of the evacuation process.

The platform houses separate accounts for transit center registrars, collective site managers, call centers, and transportation operators, and is available country-wide (where Oblast authorities are able to share accommodation information). Poruch was developed in coordination with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity of Ukraine; regional or municipal authorities as well as the ministry representatives have access to evacuation and booking requests to better coordinate provision and continuity of services. Going forward, RCC envisions transferring the ownership of the platform to the Ministry.

Recognising that access to timely and reliable information is critical for people in frontline territories to make informed decisions about whether to evacuate, NP has purchased 50 portable tablet computers for use by evacuation teams as well as 12 interactive information terminals accessible for people with hearing and visual impairments. The terminals are being installed at key transit centers making Poruch directly available to people both before and immediately after evacuation. This collaboration was possible thanks to support of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) within the Haven Consortium.



First Emergency Shelter in Kherson

The Kherson-based charitable foundation **Mangust** established, fully equipped, and continue to maintain an emergency shelter in the city of Kherson for civilians displaced by shelling and facing severe hardships. The shelter remains the only NGO-run collective shelter in Kherson.[4]

Mangust team reports: *"Our shelter has become the last refuge for those whose lives have been shattered in an instant. People who have experienced the horrors of continuous shelling, lost their homes, and miraculously survived find refuge here. These are elderly women who cannot cope on their own, mothers with frightened children who shudder at every loud sound, and people with disabilities. They come to us in a state of deep shock, often with only one bag containing their entire past life, and without documents. Our shelter for them is not just a roof over their heads, it is a place where they can finally feel safe, get hot food, and receive human warmth."*

Mangust provides a range of different services at the center. The organisation assists individuals in restoring lost or damaged identity documents, obtaining IDP status, registering with employment services, securing job opportunities, and finding a family doctor. Essential material support - such as, clothing - is provided by other, Kherson-based organisations - such as, the Bank of Necessity - in coordination with Mangust. Upon request, Mangust also provides transportation to the nearest hospital and relevant social services - e.g., the Pension Fund of Ukraine.

Mangust team keeps residents at the shelter socially engaged and offers hairdressing services free of charge. For individuals with limited mobility, hairdressing services are delivered directly at the shelter, ensuring equitable access to personal care for all residents at the shelter.



[4] *According to latest regional administration data, there are 1,029 beds in collective sites and 48,845 IDPs living in Kherson region.*

Restoring Safe and Accessible Accommodation

Since the beginning of this year, the Kherson-based charitable foundations **Rokada** and **Misto Syly** have worked to improve housing conditions in temporary accommodation, particularly for the elderly and people with limited mobility. Currently, Rokada oversees repair work at three collective centers in the city of Kherson. Renovations include the refurbishment of residential and communal spaces, modernisation of utility systems, installation of inclusive and standard sanitary facilities, and improvements to kitchens and other shared areas - all to improve safety, living conditions, and accessibility for IDPs. Rokada aims to equip up to 70 places across two collective centers, while the third will provide 70 additional places with accessibility features.

Like Mangust, Rokada offers comprehensive supports to IDPs, including access to psychosocial counselling to address war-related trauma and support adaptation, legal assistance with document restoration, and transportation services. Under NP's sub-grant programme, funded by the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF), in June 2026 Misto Syly completed a renovation of a shelter, which included installing anti-blast film on windowns and inclusive bathrooms.

Direct Care and Home-Based Support

Since December 2022, **Futurama** has supported civilians, including families with children, IDPs, people with limited mobility, and bedridden older people, by ensuring access to safe, dignified accommodation during evacuation and displacement, reducing risks of homelessness, overcrowding, and unsafe shelter. In frontline communities in Donetsk region, Futurama's home-based care, individual support, and systematic assessments help limited-mobility older adults remain as safe as possible in their homes. Through close coordination with social services, medical institutions, and humanitarian partners, Futurama improves living conditions, mitigates housing-related risks, and supports people to be linked to appropriate assistance through effective referrals and protection pathway for those most vulnerable.

Under the "Helping Hands" project, the quality of life of at least 105 bedridden and limited-mobility elderly people improved, as their basic household needs were met and they received regular care that supported their physical and emotional well-being. The project established a systemic model of assistance for lonely older people by effectively combining the team's resources, knowledge, and experience. Futurama has also formed and strengthened a volunteer community capable of providing quality assistance to most vulnerable civilians, training caregivers and volunteers, and building partnerships with local and international organisations. The project is implemented under NP's sub-grant programme funded by UHF and FCDO within the HAVEN Consortium.

We see that timely home care not only improves the quality of life of older people, but also often helps prevent crisis situations, hospitalization or forced institutionalization
- Futurama team member