



Nonviolent
Peaceforce



Mykolaiv Snapshot

Civilian Protection Needs
& Concerns in Ukraine

Assessment conducted by
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Team in Ukraine

www.nonviolentpeaceforce.com

Background

This snapshot presents several preliminary conclusions from **Nonviolent Peaceforce's** (NP) rapid protection assessment was conducted in Mykolaiv city center in early July of 2022. This report builds on analysis and recommendations published in May 2022 as part of a broader assessment focused on protection needs and response mechanisms throughout Ukraine.

Since the most recent escalation of the conflict, Mykolaiv has been a keystone location for Ukrainian territorial defense on the southern front. Sitting at the confluence of the Southern Bah and Ingul rivers, the city's geographic and strategic importance has been a focus of Russian military bombardment in efforts to try and secure the city's ports.

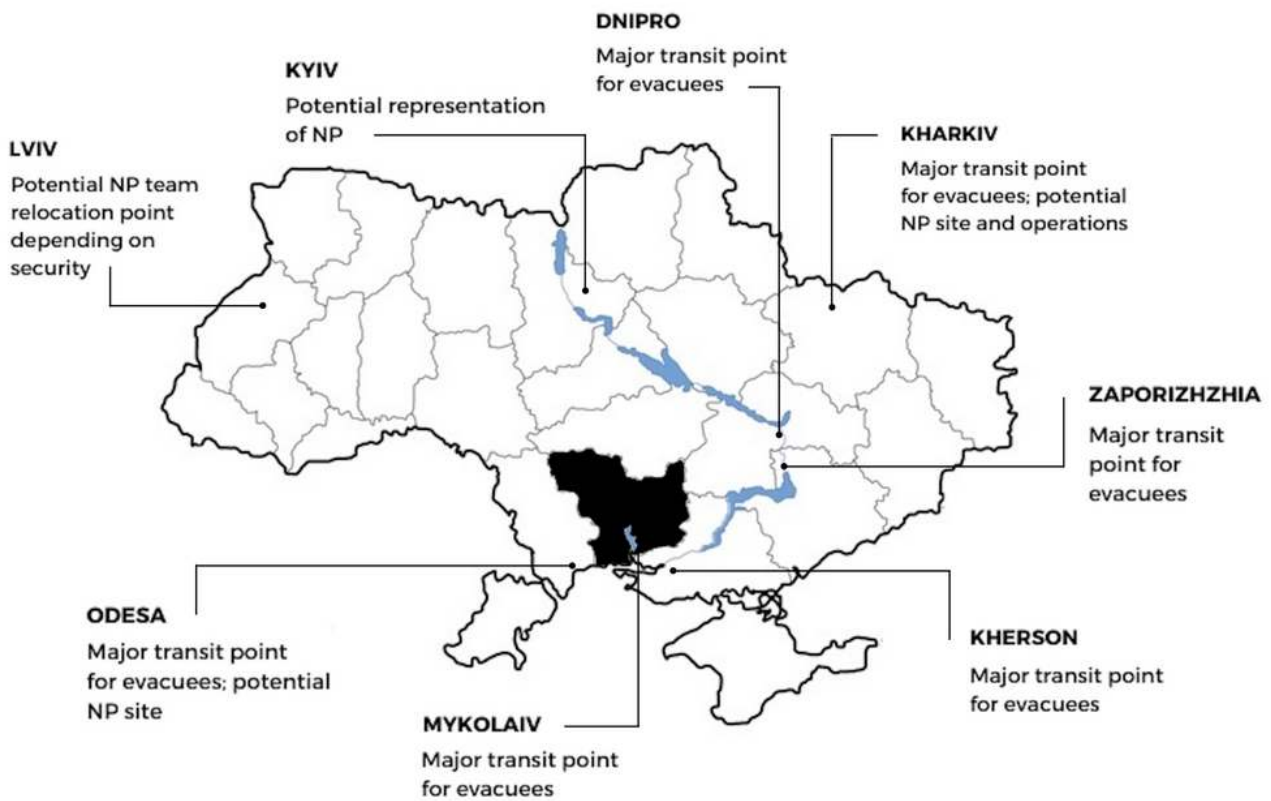


Mykolaiv acts as a main route of egress for those fleeing Russian occupied areas, specifically residents from Kherson, located 60km south-southeast of Mykolaiv city center. The assessment team has identified key evacuation routes used by civilians and civilian-led volunteer mechanisms supporting evacuations.

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.

As a result, this snapshot builds on over **24 Key Informant Interviews** (KIIs) and meetings with local government actors, nonprofit bodies, and civilian-led collectives which provided information for the snapshot analysis and situational report within Mykolaiv. This rapid assessment took place over three days in early July 2022, comprising additional outreach to civilians and local humanitarian organizations directly impacted by the conflict, as well as firsthand field observations and desk research conducted by NP staff.

All meetings were conducted in line with the principles of confidentiality, non-partisanship, and *Do No Harm* practices. Team members were clear to gain explicit consent before all interviews, and clearly introduced themselves, NP's mission, as well as the objectives of the assessment.



Urgent civilian needs as identified by NP's observations and conducted KIs.



Since the onset of the conflict, nearly half of Mykolaiv's residents have fled the city, leaving the **230,000 civilians**, mainly the elderly, exposed to continuous protection risks.



Protection Needs & Priorities

Water Shortages

As a result of Russia's military targeting, critical infrastructure has been severely compromised resulting in several key protection concerns. A dominant protection concern residents face is their access to potable drinking water. Both the city's desalinization facility and its purification plant have been destroyed compelling many to drill ad-hoc wells, which are purported to only **sustain ~5% of the city's population** and often produce water below consumptive quality.

Access to water distribution centers is limited and most significantly affects the elderly and those living with reduced mobility. Unable to travel long distances and wait in long queues at water distribution points – particularly during the hot summer months – many are compelled to rely on neighbors to bring water for them. Civilians interviewed by NP said they were not aware of active volunteer organizations that could help with water transportation.

The water shortage is exacerbating other WASH-related issues. More support is needed, including non-food items (NFI), particularly for washing, cleaning, as well as hygiene kits.

'If you don't have a car, you must come on foot. If you cannot come on foot, because you have mobility issues, you simply will not get any water. Nobody is going to bring it to you. If you want to live, you must work for it.' Nastia



Underserved Locations

Heavy shelling and consistent missile strikes to both the region and the city has led to a reduction of access leading to an insufficient and proportional response from mainstream humanitarian structures. Beyond the city center, many communities with highly vulnerable populations continue to live in isolation from public and humanitarian services lacking access to medicines, food and water, and other essential items.

The situation is particularly acute in hard-to-reach, rural areas on the outskirts of Mykolaiv city. According to a local volunteer organization, there are only 10 residents left – 9 men and 1 woman, all above 80 years old – in the village of Olenivka, a 2-hour drive from Mykolaiv. Their community is entirely **reliant on the volunteers** delivering essential supplies, which, in turn, is dependent on the ever-changing security situation. The case of Olenivka constitutes just one out of many examples of severely underserved communities as humanitarian aid continues to be concentrated in major cities and urban areas

(Un)sustainability of the Volunteer Response

As seen throughout Ukraine and exemplified above, the burden of material aid and service provision primarily falls onto the national nonprofits and volunteer collectives, which are overstretched in their capacity and under supported. As the war enters its 20th week and active shelling continues, many seek employment opportunities providing stable income.

It is clear to the assessment team that such structures have substantial capacity and know-how but lack the material and monetary resources for current sustainability and subsequent scale-up. Fuel shortages are limiting the scope of their operations while compelling teams to innovate and look for creative solutions. Mykolaiv Red Cross, for instance, began deploying cyclists to help distribute essential medicines and food packages to civilians in need.

There is, however, a notable gap in applying safeguarding practices and mainstream protection principles. All 5 local volunteer collectives and local organizations that NP interviewed are providing support for both civilians and armed Ukrainian actors, including the military and territorial defense units. This presents an obvious challenge for international humanitarian actors and their partners in maintaining neutrality.

'I live by myself, and I do not fit any criteria for receiving aid. I'm not old enough. And not ill enough. I must take care of myself; I rely only on myself only. There's no help available. Humanitarian response has been disorganized. It takes ages to reach out to anyone.' Ania

Coordination Gap

In response to urgent, abounding civilian humanitarian needs, volunteers come together sporadically forming informal networks and flexible, community-driven response mechanisms. Yet while their agility, resilience, and effectiveness have been recognized both by the local authorities and international partners, there is a need to bolster coordination among these different actors as well as integrate, rather than undermine, local structures into the wider humanitarian response.

Based on NP's initial observations and conducted KIIs, coordination between volunteer collectives, national governmental organizations (NGOs), and local authorities is limited. Several of the volunteer collectives interviewed by NP are unaware of existing material aid hubs in and outside of Mykolaiv, nor of the growing protection concerns at water distribution points.

'There are no volunteers helping to bring the water. Communities try taking care of themselves, their neighbors, bringing water to the elderly. Everyone helps however they can. There are so many grandmas unable to access clean, drinking water so every time we come by, we bring back a bottle or two to one of them.' Svetlana

Returnees

Although most who have been displaced from Mykolaiv district have not yet begun to return, those who have fled are purported to be receiving information from those still living in the city. Due to the protracted nature of the conflict, many residents have become acclimated to significant safety and security risks, in turn **altering perceptions of risk**. Despite consistent, almost daily shelling, many remaining in the city have reduced interaction with shelter systems. This is likely to impact displaced people's decision to return to these areas, despite the significant ongoing risk.

'We got used to it. We no longer care for the air alarms.' Zhenya

Winterization

Widespread damage to essential utilities infrastructure has severely impacted citizens of Mykolaiv Oblast and their access to basic services, with many coping without regular water, electricity, or gas supplies, especially in the more remote, rural areas. As winter approaches, the **needs of people will spike** while the ability of local and international organizations to provide immediate, life-saving assistance will deteriorate.

According to NP's assessment, it is likely that the Ukrainian military will take up most of the available fuel resources in anticipation of winter and the escalation of the Mykolaiv-Kherson front. This means challenges faced by communities in the hard-to-reach areas will be exacerbated in securing heating and functioning cooking facilities.

Central heating systems, which are common in the city, will be rendered functionally ineffective or shut off entirely due to the high levels of damage to buildings. Innumerable broken windows and other breaks in building structures will allow the cold to permeate seals and are expected to freeze critical parts of a building's heating infrastructure. Alternative heating systems and sealing-off kits will be highly needed in anticipation of the winter season.



'I have two daughters that fled to Slovakia at the beginning of the war. They asked me to come with them but what would I do there? I am 75 years old, I do not know the language.'

'So I live by myself with our cat - my daughters named him Balushka. He is the man of the house, I have conversations with him. There is nobody else to check in on me.'

NP team assisted Zina as she collapsed at one of the distribution points due to extreme heat and exhaustion. NP was able to provide immediate care and accompanied Zina back to her apartment on the outskirts of the city.'

Recommendations

The city of Mykolaiv as well as the entire Oblast is critically underserved. The presence of international humanitarian organizations, at the time of reporting, is limited to a few INGOs conducting irregular visits from neighboring towns, such as Odesa. This puts a constraint on the ongoing humanitarian response in the Oblast, especially as it pertains to the hard-to-reach, rural areas. To that end, NP calls humanitarian actors, donors, and communities to take urgent action.



Support water trucking in the short-term and the rehabilitation of water purification plants in the medium to long-term

As exemplified by the above testimonies, water shortages constitutes a major challenge in the city of Mykolaiv disproportionately affecting the elderly and people with special needs. Water trucking should, therefore, be supported by international actors to reach most underserved population groups.

Deploy mobile, dynamic teams to respond to emergency protection concerns resulting from water and food shortages

The ever-changing nature of this conflict necessitates an equally agile humanitarian response. To this end, NP advocates for the deployment of mobile teams to service community members in and outside urban areas. This particularly relates to water distribution points established across the Oblast, which require regular protection and crowd monitoring to identify population groups exposed to additional vulnerabilities.



Support coordination mechanisms among local organizations

As expressed by KILs, there is a need for supporting coordination efforts among local (volunteer) organizations to share information on the availability of resources and better manage response.



Extend operations outside the city center into rural areas

Considering civilian needs and protection concerns outlined above, the need to decentralize service provision beyond the cities of Odesa and Mykolaiv is crucial. This would also allow for volunteer collectives to share the burden of providing humanitarian aid and better identified population groups exposed to vulnerabilities.

Enhance protection assessment and monitoring to inform protection and overall humanitarian response

The security situation in and around Mykolaiv changes daily. Protection assessments, monitoring and analysis ought to be triggered by key events with reference to and in consultation with the Protection Cluster (PC), INSO and OCHA.



Monitor, report, and advocate on the human rights situation on the outskirts of Mykolaiv and Kherson

Residents of Mykolaiv have been receiving troubling reports of human rights violations in and around Kherson and other Russian-occupied territories. This is consistent with human rights violations throughout Northern Ukraine. Efforts need to be put towards verifying information and advocating for the protection of civilians at a higher, political level.

Involve winterization preparedness into response planning

The needs of people in Mykolaiv Oblast are expected to be much higher during the upcoming winter season. To ensure emergency response capacity, humanitarian actors are encouraged to involve winterization preparedness into their programming.

