



NONVIOLENT
PEACEFORCE



KHERSON RAPID ASSESSMENT

CIVILIAN PROTECTION
NEEDS & RESPONSES

NOVEMBER 2022

BACKGROUND

On November 11, 41 settlements in Kherson Oblast, including Kherson city, were de-occupied by Ukrainian forces. Civilians who live in these areas have endured months of combat and occupation. Services have been interrupted or severely disrupted due to damage or destruction of facilities and infrastructure through combat actions, looting of the majority of the valuable assets by the retreating Russian troops, and dispersion of the people rendering said services.

Currently, Kherson city and surrounding areas continue to fall within range of artillery, and the retaken areas report multiple shelling incidents daily with frequent reports of civilian casualties. The damage to civilian buildings is extensive, affecting housing and critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, energy generation and water services. Landmines, explosive traps and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to pose a significant risk for civilians and humanitarian actors operating in the area.

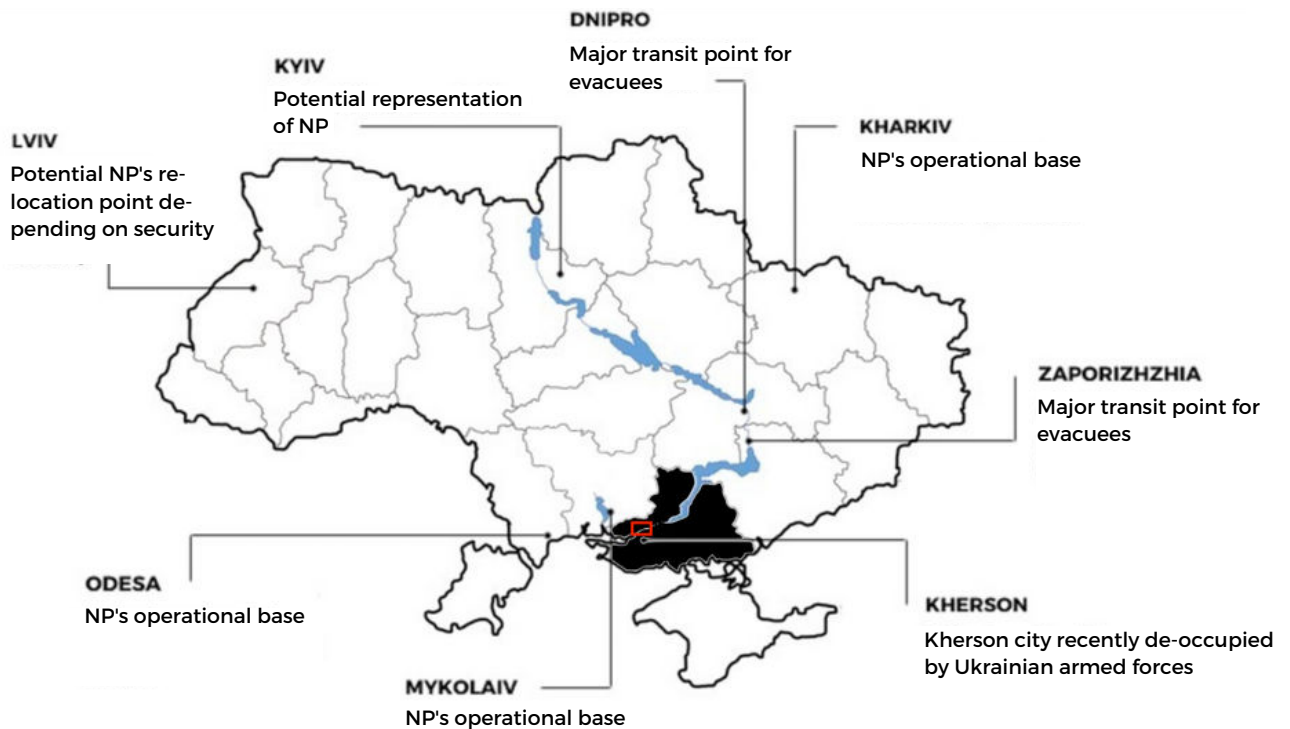
METHODOLOGY

Following the de-occupation of Kherson and gaining access to the Oblast, Nonviolent Peaceforce Ukraine (NPUA) conducted a two-day rapid protection assessment with the purpose of identifying civilian protection concerns and analysing urgent humanitarian needs in the recently de-occupied area. Over the course of two days, the NPUA team engaged over 30 actors in Key Informant Interviews (18 civilians, 5 representatives from government authorities, and 8 representatives of local volunteer organisations), as well as conducting observations









at a key aid distribution warehouse and in a central humanitarian and community hub in Kherson City. This rapid assessment did not directly engage in hromadas outside of Kherson City but nevertheless has implications for regional and rural areas of the Oblast and serves as the basis for further assessment in these sites. This assessment is rapid in nature, and cannot provide a comprehensive overview of civilian needs. The NPUA team can provide more detailed briefings on request and will supplement this initial assessment with updates.

I spent the entire occupation in Kherson. The worst part was the checkpoints - we were all very strongly checked, especially young men. I was afraid my boyfriend would be taken away and forced to serve in the Russian army. I saw with my own eyes how the soldiers at the checkpoint would put black bags on their heads and take them away - a woman in Kherson, age 25.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE



Facts & Figures

-  Kherson city has been de-occupied since November 11
-  Population pre-war was 300,000 – now authorities report that over 75,000 civilians currently reside in the City
-  De-occupied territories include 41 nearby settlements
-  The Snapshot was conducted between November 21 and 23
-  NPUA monitored distributions at a central humanitarian & community hub in the city
-  NPUA will work to provide more comprehensive service mapping
-  NPUA engaged over 30 actors in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), including civilians, volunteers, and government
-  NPUA can provide more detailed briefings on request & will supplement this initial assessment with updates

ESSENTIAL SERVICES DISRUPTION & PROTECTION

Protection needs and potential responses in Kherson are interlinked with and shaped by the destruction of essential infrastructure from ongoing artillery attacks, and impacts of occupation by Russian forces from March through November 2022. In addition, the availability of goods remains limited, with several KIIs reporting inflated prices for essential household items. Current humanitarian aid to the region is vastly inadequate given the scale of civilian needs.

The Oblast is currently without electricity, with limited resources available for back-up power such as generators. This means that as winter quickly approaches, civilians do not have heating, electricity for cooking food, or the capacity to charge mobile phones and other equipment. This also means that water pumps are unable to function, and the city is without capacity to provide sufficient or potable water. There are no construction materials commercially available to repair housing and windows damaged by shelling.

“A main hunger of Kherson City is to receive those with professional skills,” shared one official.

Mobile phone service connectivity is limited, and there is therefore limited communication with communities for information dissemination of support services and availability of aid. Just one hospital is currently functioning, and without the capacity to use essential equipment and with limited staff. Additionally, there are little support structures for staff operating within this hospital.

In response, authorities have established several ‘heating points’ run by generators, one of the few places where electricity is currently accessible to civilians. In these locations, civilians can stay for short periods to be provided with warmth inside tents, recharge mobile phones, and can access informal and ad-hoc food distributions. Scaling up of such sites requires additional generators, fuel for said generators, tents, and could act as a central location for additional material, hot meals, and service provision. Scaling up these sites must also consider security concerns of ongoing shelling, as these locations are exposed and nearby shelters are not clearly identified. Civilians fear they may be targeted if gathering at centralised distribution points.

Though authorities identified repair of essential infrastructure as an urgent priority, they note the extreme difficulty of this task. Generators and other specialist equipment were looted or damaged by occupying troops, so many of the resources required to restore or repair essential services are not currently available. This also applies to emergency generators, of which there is a severe shortage. In addition, the mass displacement of the civilian population from Kherson has included many of those persons with the technical skills necessary for repairs.

Without rapid, large-scale assistance in the face of ongoing shelling and the rapidly oncoming winter, it is unlikely that services will be able to be rehabilitated at a scale sufficient to support the civilian population.

PROTECTION NEEDS & RESPONSES

This lack of essential infrastructure and services in Kherson – and the difficulties faced in repairing this infrastructure with speed – shapes the protection needs, responses and priorities identified by civilians, authorities, and local service providers.

Evacuations

As a result of intensifying attacks targeting the city and the dire state of infrastructure and services, authorities have advised civilians, particularly those with children, older people, those with medical conditions, and those with limited mobility, to evacuate. Authorities said they hope to evacuate 100 civilians per day, and to see at least 6000 civilians relocated in the next four weeks, though transport capacity and fuel costs are limiting factors. Many civilians reported a reluctance to evacuate despite the difficult conditions, with one noting a perception that “if you leave you are giving up on your home.” Some civilians are currently evacuating from Kherson using private cars.

For those who do wish to evacuate, information about how to do so and resources are scant. Though a central hotline has been set up by authorities, a lack of access to phones and connectivity severely limits access to information. A lack of transportation, including buses, as well as trains interrupted by electricity blackouts, severely restrict how many people can be transported. A lack of communication capacity means that civilians often wait for transportation that is simply not available.

When people are evacuated, there are serious concerns around respect for protection principles, with a lack of information provided to civilians about final destinations, services available in areas of displacement, and their rights as displaced persons. Some reported that civilians believed they were being evacuated to one city, only to end up in another without prior warning.

In terms of priority responses, investing in the dissemination of accurate information about evacuation processes (including in non-electronic forms such as posters, flyers, and loudspeaker announcements) is critical. When people do choose and are able to evacuate, accurate information about services at transit points and final destinations is essential. Protective presence by trained protection teams throughout evacuation journeys will assist both in provision of accurate information and respect for protection principles for internally displaced persons, including ensuring evacuations are voluntarily.

Distribution of Humanitarian Aid

The availability of aid – food, water, cash assistance, non-food items – is extremely limited. Where aid is made available, it is provided at a central location to local authorities, who reported they then distribute to different distribution points in the city (approximately 30 at current count).

Though lists of people with specific needs such as older people or people with disabilities exist (and did so prior to occupation by Russian forces), these have been challenging to update in the wake of the occupation, and so cannot comprehensively capture the vast needs of the current population. Though some social workers are available to assist with this administration for aid distribution, the number of available staff is limited (one interviewee estimated a total of 80 such staff for the city were currently working, as opposed to a pre-war staff of 130). In lieu of this capacity, some civilians have mobilised to assist one another: “there are some people with disabilities in our building, and we have a focal point,” reported one resident. “They tried to help, but they still haven’t received aid.”

Due to the occupation, Kherson's civil society, including volunteer networks, have been impacted and are still in the process of reorganizing. This modality of support, that has been critical in other impacted communities, is currently limited within the city. However, local structures in surrounding areas, such as Mykolaiv, are working to respond to needs on the ground as well as bolster current local capacities.

Beyond limited availability, civilians reported that they had received no guidance on how to receive aid. Even at one of the central humanitarian points in the city, there was no information available about eligibility, or when, where or how to receive assistance. Though some information is being disseminated electronically via Telegram and other social channels, this is not sufficient given the lack of connectivity of the vast majority of civilians. This is compounded for those who lack the mobility to go to central charging points, or who are unable to use or lack mobile phones. People

also reported a fear of accessing aid at central distribution points, because of previous targeted shelling of these locations by Russian forces.

Humanitarian actors can assist by increasing distribution capacity beyond initial distribution points. Information related to aid distributions must be openly available and transparent, and at this stage, in analog form (posters, flyers, loudspeaker announcements). Humanitarian presence at distributions, and in particular protective presence by trained protection staff, will assist with information dissemination, ensure aid is being distributed equitably and in consideration of protection principals, and identification of those with the most urgent humanitarian needs.

Physical Threats to Civilian Safety

In both Kherson City and the Oblast, the risk of ongoing shelling and harm from UXO remains high. Though there are some available bunkers (one report suggested 19 shelters had been identified), these have not been assessed for safety and necessary equipment at this stage. With intensification of shelling, and the difficulties noted above in relation to evacuation of the civilian population, ensuring safe and equipped shelter for civilian use must be a priority.

In addition, the risk to those in Kherson from UXO and booby traps remains high. Though demining is a priority for authorities, this is again limited by the sheer scale of the task and available capacity. There is an urgent need to educate civilian populations on mine safety and awareness. At the time of this assessment, there was no public information about mine risks available at the central humanitarian point in Kherson City, other than that provisioned by the team undertaking this assessment. There is a clear need and public appetite for mine education for adults and children alike,

particularly in analog forms such as large public information posters, flyers, and activity books. Other safety equipment such as rechargeable torches is also required. Demining organisations without direct presence in Kherson can provide materials through the ongoing convoy operations, as well as through partners like Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

In the wake of the occupation by Russian forces, severe mental health needs are evident. Civilians are struggling to cope with prolonged stress and trauma and have almost no access to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Civilians and authorities alike identified this as an urgent need, including specialist services dedicated to children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Many specialists and authorities dedicated to this type of social assistance prior to the war have been themselves displaced or are currently serving other essential response functions in the wake of de-occupation. Psychological assistance needs to be rapidly deployed, both in the form of static services at central humanitarian distribution points, and in mobile teams that are able to reach those who may not have access to these locations. Initial psychological first aid responses can enable a better understanding of current needs, and provide entry points for more comprehensive roll out of support services.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

It is clear, as with other areas that have been occupied by Russian forces, that the likelihood of conflict-related sexual violence and other forms of SGBV is extremely high. Those who have suffered SGBV over the course of the occupation currently have extremely limited access to MHPSS services, as well as limited medical support (with

only one hospital functioning and widespread unavailability of medicines). Understanding the scale of this issue is therefore a major challenge, compounded by social stigmatisation against survivors of SGBV. One key shelter dedicated to SGBV prior to occupation is not operational due to lack of staff and resources.

There is also a notable connection between communities under stress and rises in household violence. There is an urgent need to deploy specialised teams throughout recently de-occupied areas dedicated to providing wraparound services to SGBV survivors. Without this assistance, women and girls in particular are at risk of exacerbated, long-term, physical and psychological trauma.

Child Protection

A specific child protection rapid assessment is necessary, with current understanding of the scale of child protection needs limited. There is concern particularly for child-headed households, and children with medical conditions or disabilities. In general, children are increasingly socially isolated, with many without contact with friends who were evacuated or unable to be reached due to communications outages. Without electricity, internet connectivity, and other services, children and teenagers are not currently able to access education.

Even if such services were to be restored, it was reported that remote learning would also be impacted by the looting and breaking of computers and tablets used to attend classes. Children and teenagers identified the need for group social activities with other children. There was widespread recognition of the need for specialist MHPSS services for children. "We have nothing to do, no coping mechanisms," shared one teenage boy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Civilian needs in Kherson are extreme and a rapid scale-up of humanitarian assistance is required in response – particularly as winter fast approaches.

1. Inform: Access to information is a priority. Whether regarding evacuations or the distribution of aid, it is critical that civilians know where and how to access information about services. In light of current electronic communications limitations, information has to be shared not only online, but in analog form. This includes options like loudspeaker announcements, posters, flyer distributions, and physical schedules for planned distributions posted in central public locations such as heating points. The international humanitarian sector has a key role to play in providing additional capacity to currently overburdened local actors.

2. Evacuate: As shared with civilians by authorities, current ongoing attacks and compromised essential infrastructure and services mean that Kherson is not currently safe for civilians. Conditions are likely to worsen with the onset of winter and limited capacity for repairs. As far as possible, humanitarian actors need to support those who would like to seek safety elsewhere with accompaniment, transport, and service provision for displacement.

3. Decentralise: Where aid is available in Kherson, it is predominantly confined to central city areas. There is an urgent need to

access, evaluate and assist the needs of those who are living in areas beyond the central city. Civilians who remained in these areas are often those with specific needs, such as older people.

4. Protect through Presence: The presence of humanitarian actors and other essential support for civilians in Kherson remains limited. Increased direct humanitarian presence from local and international organisations, and in particular trained protection teams, will enable more comprehensive identification of civilian needs in general and at distributions, as well as assist with information, aid, and services provision.

5. Educate: Despite ongoing threats from artillery and UXO, providing civilians with the information they need to keep themselves safe can save lives. There is an urgent need to scale up mine education and awareness for civilians, including children, and to ensure bomb shelters are fit and safe for purpose.

6. Scale: There is an urgent need to scale the capacity of trained civilian and humanitarian actors to deliver and distribute aid and services. Communities themselves, including civil society organisations, volunteer groups, and churches, from both Kherson and adjacent oblasts such as Mykolaiv, are trying to fill this gap. International humanitarian organisations can take their lead and help to support ongoing efforts by local actors to strengthen and expand their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY



INFORM

It is critical that civilians know where and how to access information about services.



DECENTRALISE

There is an urgent need to assist those who are living in areas beyond the central city.



PROTECT THROUGH PRESENCE

Increased humanitarian presence from local and international actors is needed.



EVACUATE

Humanitarian actors need to support those who would like to seek safety elsewhere.



EDUCATE

There is an urgent need to scale up mine education and awareness for civilians.



SCALE

There is an urgent need to scale the capacity of trained civilian and humanitarian actors.

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