



NONVIOLENT  
PEACEFORCE



# SNAPSHOT: KHERSON UPDATE

CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS FROM  
DE-OCCUPIED KHERSON OBLAST

DECEMBER 2022

*This snapshot presents a brief overview of protection concerns and responses related to civilian movements from de-occupied territories in Kherson Oblast and is complementary to the Rapid Protection Assessment conducted in Kherson in late November 2022 by Nonviolent Peaceforce Ukraine (NPUA). NPUA has a static presence in Kherson City and has been providing unarmed protection to civilians in the major transit areas of Odesa and Mykolaiv.*

## BACKGROUND

As Ukraine has retaken control of the right bank of Kherson city and surrounding areas to the north in November 2022, civilians who endured months under occupation by Russian forces now have access to greater freedom of movement. In response, Kherson residents have begun relocating to areas with functioning infrastructure and availability of basic services, and further away from the still active frontline.

Ongoing lack of electricity, mobile and internet connectivity, and overburdened government services have led to a lack of information and service provision for civilians seeking to relocate from Kherson. A lack of clear guidance, including before departure, en-route, and on arrival, raises concerns about civilian capacities for voluntary and informed decision making.

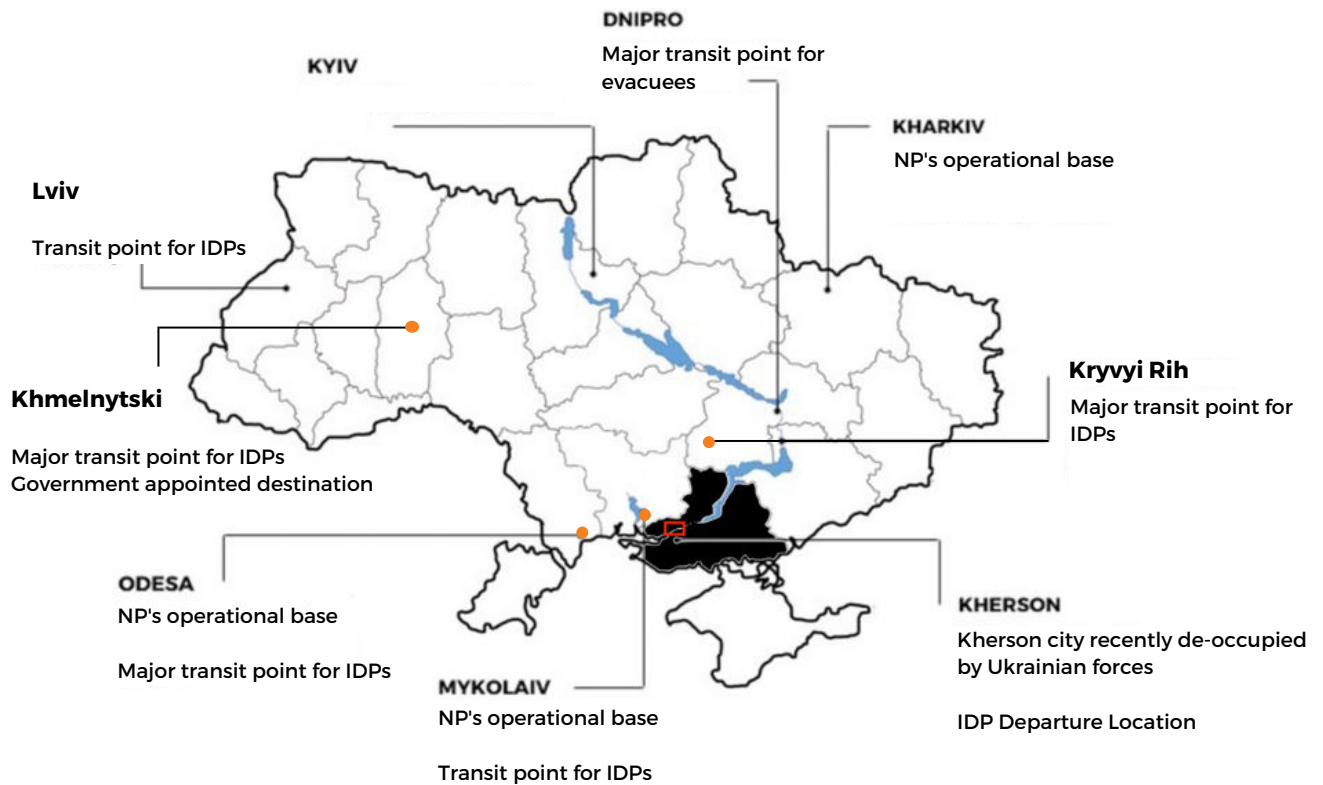
The most common routes taken by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) leaving Kherson are dependent on the mode of transport. For those evacuating via formal, government-operated means (allocated train cars on passenger routes), IDPs are being transported from Kherson, through Mykolaiv, and arrive in Khmelnytskyi. For those evacuating with informal pathways, such as volunteer networks and private vehicles they are predominantly moving from Kherson, through Mykolaiv, and arriving in Odesa and Kryvyi Rih. From these two transit locations, IDPs moving from Kherson attempt to find long-term accommodation or further movement out of Ukraine.

*I was staying with my brother in Kyiv but now I want to go back home. I don't know how to get there. My wife died three days ago.*

*I could call my daughters to meet me but I can't remember the name of the village where they live. I don't know what to do.*

*-Man in Kherson train station, 85*

# GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE



## CIVILIAN MOVEMENT OVERVIEW

Due to significant challenges in repairing critical infrastructure and the onset of winter, Kherson City and Oblast authorities are encouraging a two-phase relocation for civilians within the recently de-occupied territories. The first phase is focused on coordinating with hromada heads encouraging community members to move to Kherson city center where they can access services. Though these services are limited, they are more widely available when compared to surrounding areas. Once in Kherson city, authorities are advocating for civilian populations to move beyond Kherson Oblast due to insufficient availability of basic services, destruction of critical infrastructure, and ongoing risk from shelling, Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) and mines.

# POINT OF DEPARTURE

## - KHERSON CITY -

Kherson authorities have established a hotline to provide information for civilians considering moving out of the city. Within areas of displacement, information is communicated through government hosted chat groups on digital platforms, such as Telegram and Viber. Within these chats, residents can access registration forms and call centers to affirm their intentions for movement out of the Oblast. Understanding many remaining in both the city center and surrounding hromadas have limited access to cell phones and internet, authorities expect the real number of residents with intention to relocate to be higher than current registration numbers. Desire to relocate is expected to increase as the winter sets in if information on movement becomes more accessible and if services in Kherson are not reestablished.

Kherson city government is in the process of developing these mechanisms and balancing current civilian needs with present-day capacities. As of December 3, Kherson authorities, in cooperation with Ukrainian Railways (Ukrzaliznytsia), are providing four train-cars on a passenger train each day. Once those with intent to depart Kherson arrive at the train station, they confirm registration, move through a security check facilitated by city police and military authorities, and are then able to board the trains. This modality is facilitating civilian movements to a transit point in Mykolaiv with final point of reception in Khmelnytskyi.

Despite these efforts, current capacities are unable to meet civilian demands for relocation. While waiting for transit, there is also limited support or information for civilians which leads to further risk exposures. An example of this would be at the Odesa train station where residents have reported waiting for hours, sometimes overnight, with limited information, heating or charging points, and protection safeguards.

Aside from these formalized government-supported movements, a majority of civilians are departing the Oblast via ad-hoc and informal means. This is inclusive of public transport (paid for buses and trains), private transport, as well as volunteer and NGO transportation support. This is, in part, due to the fact that many residents do not want to travel large distances from their homes and support structures. Although these informal means of movement are effective and rapid, they create large gaps in support in areas of reception. Although many local and national collectives are facilitating these movements responsibly, there are equally as many leaving displaced persons in unfamiliar locations without wrap-around services or information on how to access aid structures.

# TRANSIT POINTS

## - ODESA & MYKOLAIV -

At the time of writing, Oblast authorities in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa, are in the process of establishing transit points in support of civilian populations on the move. Additional and on-going assessment may be necessary in the short term.

In the meantime, displaced civilians are congregating in central areas such as train stations. In Odesa, for instance, the main train station has organically been established as a central location for IDPs arriving in the Oblast. In response, the Odesa city social service office, as well as several international and national organizations, have established temporary presence to support recently arrived IDPs. These efforts are aimed at addressing a significant gap but remain inadequate considering the scale of civilian need.

## POINT OF RECEPTION

As there is little information regarding final destinations where IDPs are arriving, further assessment of locations and understanding of available services in said locations is needed. At the time of writing, government authorities have assigned Khmelnytskyi as a reception point due to availability of accommodation for people arriving from Kherson Oblast.

## RETURN TO PLACES OF ORIGIN

Days after leaving Kherson, some civilians in Odesa told NPUA they are looking for transportation to return back to Kherson due to the inability to secure medium to long-term shelter and access support services in areas of displacement. This has been a challenge particularly for young or middle-aged men as they are often considered not eligible for aid and accommodation by providers of humanitarian services.



# PROTECTION GAPS

## INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

There are major concerns about the lack of information available to civilians at different stages along displacement routes. Given the need for movements to be free and informed, information provision must be urgently addressed in both areas of origin and displacement. When engaging with IDPs from Kherson arriving to Odesa, a majority of respondents noted they were given little to no information on available services in displacement locations. Further, it was expressed that what information was provided, was often outdated and no longer relevant, or without tangible means to access said service.

## COORDINATION

Despite efforts by local and Oblast level governments, provision of protection and support services for people on the move remains insufficient. Occupation has seriously compromised many of the regular government functions intended to respond to such crises, including data, resources and staff capacity. Difficulties with coordination have been exacerbated due to ad-hoc and private relocations, which are harder to track and anticipate. During rapid assessments, Odesa Oblast authorities expressed that the resources they have at their disposal are not reaching those who need it most due to a lack of coordination and information sharing in areas of origin. This has had a negative impact on populations exposed to vulnerabilities, such as people with disabilities, older people, unaccompanied minors, and other persons in need of specialized care.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

Current humanitarian aid and service provision is not sufficient to meet the urgent needs of civilians, either those who remain in Kherson or those who have been displaced. A major gap in service provision expressed by authorities and IDPs alike, is the provision of sustainable, medium to long-term accommodation. There is an urgent need to increase resource and staff support for authorities and humanitarian actors to deliver and distribute aid and services. Communities themselves, including civil society organizations, volunteer groups, and churches, from both Kherson and adjacent Oblasts such as Mykolaiv, are trying to fill this gap. International humanitarian organizations can take their lead and help to support ongoing efforts by local actors to strengthen and help expand their work.

# URGENT ACTION & RECOMENDATIONS



## SUPPORT OF EVACUATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY

People whose mobility is limited for the purposes of using transportation due to any physical or mental disability are in need of urgent support for relocation. In order to properly enable support for people with these needs, local authorities and specialized volunteer groups need monetary, staffing, and material assistance. This includes the provision of specialized staff trained in the care and transport of persons with reduced mobility, funds directly allocated for fuel, accompanied staff, and driver stipends, as well as specific equipment and vehicles specialized for protective movements.



### PRIORITIZE

Prioritization for those living with reduced mobility, as well as support for staffing and equipment.

## PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS ON THE MOVE

In addition to persons with reduced mobility, other civilians facing specific protection risks such as unaccompanied minors and older people would benefit from protective presence and accompaniment throughout the duration of movement. Protection teams accompanying civilians can identify needs, provide continuous duty of care, ensure up-to-date and accurate information and rights and services are provided, prevent risk of human trafficking and violence throughout the displacement corridor, and protect displaced persons from further re-traumatization and harm.



### PROTECT THROUGH PRESENCE

Increased humanitarian presence from local and international actors is needed.

## **ESTABLISH TRANSIT & RECEPTION POINTS**

Transit and reception points should be set-up in the safest locations possible, have minimum humanitarian standards in place to protect people's dignity and privacy, and be easily accessible for people with disabilities. This includes access to shelter in the event of shelling or other physical threats to civilians. Wrap-around services need to be available at such points, coordinated between authorities and other non-government organizations that are able to assist.

## **ESTABLISHING MULTI-SECTORAL RESPONSE TEAMS AT POINTS OF RECEPTION**

At such transit/reception points, the physical presence of multi-sectoral response teams needs to be established to assist to provide both information and services. By coordinating with local authorities and humanitarian actors, these teams should focus on information dissemination and directly respond to the needs of recently arrived IDPs.

Such teams should consist of focal points from relevant service providers (local, national, and international) specializing in provision of medical assistance, protection, shelter and accommodation, transport services, child protection, legal support, and cash assistance programming. Protection through presence by trained protection staff is essential to deter violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence, identify persons at higher risk of discrimination, harassment, and abuse such as minority groups, women, children or vulnerable solo IDPs, and ensure people who experienced violence have rapid access to post-incident support services.



### **INFORM**

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



### **MULTI-SECTORAL TEAM**

Establishment of multi-sectoral presence in transit locations where and how to access information about services.



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