

The background image shows Independence Square in Kyiv, Ukraine, under a grey, overcast sky. The central column with the 'Motherland' statue is prominent. In the foreground, there are stacks of white sandbags and wooden barriers. A sign with a red heart and the text 'Я ❤️ УКРАЇНА' is visible. Buildings with signs like 'ГОТЕЛЬ' and 'ukraina' are in the background.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

CIVILIAN PROTECTION NEEDS & RESPONSES IN UKRAINE

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BACKGROUND

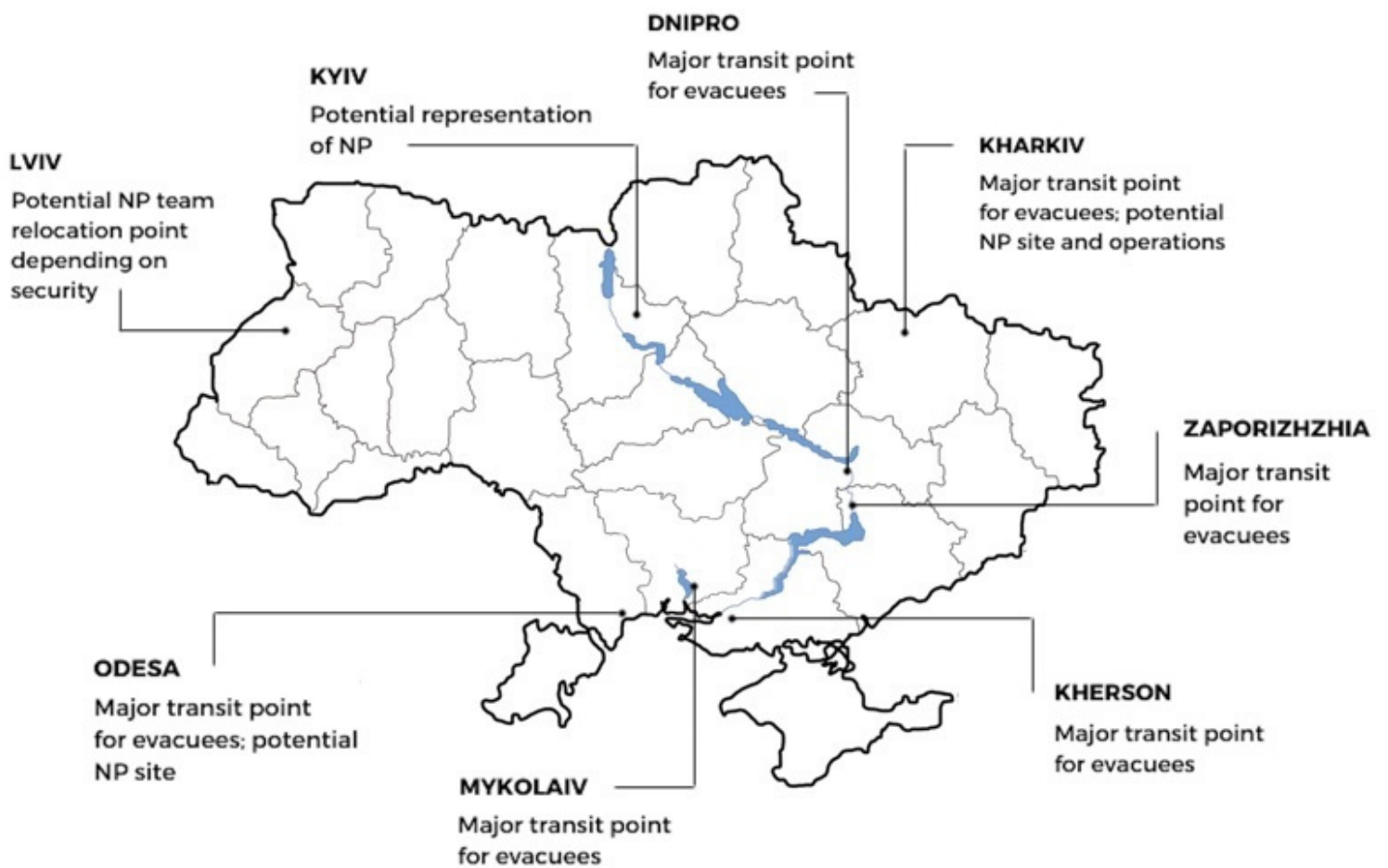
This summary of preliminary findings presents key conclusions from the assessment conducted in April 2022 by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) and makes recommendations on emergency and future protection programming in Ukraine. A comprehensive version of this report will be available in the coming weeks.

The assessment incorporates desk research conducted in February and March 2022 prior to the arrival of the assessment team; at the time of writing, the assessment also includes over 50 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and meetings with civilians, government, humanitarian and other stakeholders in Ukraine; and observations from the month-long assessment field visit conducted in April 2022.

Initial research identified protection concerns of civilians exposed to ongoing violence, including risks to civilians prevented from evacuating, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities; risks to civilians along evacuation routes; increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) among displaced populations; increased child protection risks, in particular to unaccompanied children and those with disabilities; social cohesion among displaced and host communities.

In interviews with civilians, the NP assessment team sought to collect the following information and address the following issues: demographics (age, gender, occupation); experiences of mobility and evacuation; safety and security; protection risks to vulnerable groups, including children; access to humanitarian services.

STAKEHOLDER OVERVIEW



Through other stakeholder interviews, the team sought to gain an overview of response efforts and, in some cases, to consider potential partnerships.

The team met with (I)NGOs; UN agencies; volunteer-based civil society organisations; government; and military authorities.

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED: 52

PROTECTION NEEDS

AN OVERVIEW

01

Child protection

02

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

03

Protection of people with disabilities and the elderly

04

Environmental impacts of conflict

05

Social cohesion and displaced/host community interactions

06

Proliferation of weapons & militarisation

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

AN OVERVIEW

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PROTECTION NEEDS

The assessment identified and confirmed a number of key protection needs. This analysis aligns with protection concerns highlighted by the Ukrainian Government, and through the Protection Cluster and related Sub-Clusters. In-depth analysis across these areas of interest is available through NP for interested partners.

Child protection: Child protection needs were raised by almost every stakeholder interviewed during the assessment. Within Ukraine, volunteer centres are working in close coordination with Government authorities to respond to situations of family separation and unaccompanied minors. Separate shelters are available for children, along with child-focused services such as psychosocial support. There is widespread concern about the interruption of education. Major concerns also relate to the forced movement of children to Russia, who are almost impossible to trace once removed from local areas. An ongoing concern relates to those children with disabilities institutionalised prior to the invasion who are yet to be evacuated.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: In addition to generalised increases in risks of SGBV associated with occupation and displacement already well canvassed in other reports, a number of key SGBV-related needs were identified by stakeholders. The risk of SGBV is compounded for those people who experience multiple forms of marginalisation. For example, people organising evacuations shared that they had observed young women and girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds voluntarily agreeing to be trafficked to Germany to get free transportation out of conflict-affected areas. Local partners have been clear that the risk of trafficking persists, despite the difficulties faced in establishing case numbers. Other stakeholders referenced the experiences of LGBTIQ+ and Roma communities, though specific examples reported were limited.

Protection of people with disabilities and the elderly: Some stakeholders raised concerns about the ongoing protection risks to those in frontline and frontline-adjacent areas who have been unable or unwilling to evacuate. This particularly affects people with disabilities and illness, children living in institutions and hospitals (see above), and the elderly. Additional mapping of the protection needs of these communities, and provision of options for evacuation, remains essential.

Environmental impacts of conflict: Some stakeholders raised concern about the ongoing protection risks associated with environmental degradation, including the risk of attacks on nuclear and chemical facilities. The ongoing use of cluster munitions by both Russian and Ukrainian forces also compounds existing concerns about unexploded ordnance.

Social cohesion and displaced/host community interactions: A number of stakeholders raised concern about tensions between host and displaced communities emerging in the coming months, inside as well as outside of Ukraine. Though currently the response from host communities is cohesive (see below), this is likely to become more strained.

This is compounded by the economic pressures faced by displaced communities who have moved from the East to Western Ukraine, where the cost of living is in general much higher. While we observed an impressive amount of community solidarity across Ukraine (LGBTQ people, for example, experiencing a sense of acceptance by religious leaders), some people pointed out tensions within neighbourhoods, for example about the impact of widespread unemployment on Ukrainian society.

Proliferation of weapons and militarisation: As the conflict has progressed, there has been a mass proliferation of arms and light weapons within Ukraine. Many more civilians in Ukraine now have access to weaponry, which raises concerns for longer term community safety and security. As in other conflict settings, recognising the risks associated with weapons proliferation and militarisation is crucial to managing potential negative outcomes into the future.

PROTECTION GAPS & RESPONSES

NP has identified and connected with a range of community based humanitarian and protection mechanisms, including 14 shelters, 4 youth organisations, and 6 women-led volunteer response groups that are connected with the emergency response. The vast majority of organisations and individuals are operating on a volunteer basis. The immediate response of these networks and shelters has been impressive, with clear processes for identifying and registering IDPs, and connecting them with aid and services. In some cases, IDPs themselves are providing this aid – for example, in one major centre in Dnipro, half the staff are themselves internally displaced. The legal assistance desk was staffed by lawyers from Mariupol and Donetsk, who had recently fled their own homes.

Far more than would be possible in the context of an evolving international aid response, local volunteer are currently best placed to understand and respond to the fears, needs, and desires of those passing through these centres. What can be learned from this response? What role, if any, remains for international humanitarian actors in this context?

In general, the heavily volunteer based response raises some concerns about the sustainability of this response. Though it is difficult to predict the future trajectory of this conflict, current Russian positioning suggests that this will be a drawn-out war. Russian objectives are not currently being met due to strong Ukrainian defence; but nor has the Ukrainian military been able to make significant advances into the Eastern and Southern fronts. The military negotiation of these frontlines is likely to be ongoing for months if not years. In the midst of this, civilians – particularly those under Russian occupation or who have been displaced – will continue to suffer war-related harms and protection risks.

As this persists, key concerns arise in relation to the protection response:

1. The sustainability of a volunteer-based response

The work of local volunteers has been an essential and inspiring element of the humanitarian response in Ukraine. Thousands of people, particularly women, are taking time from regular work to staff collective centres, most often without ongoing salary support from other employment. As the conflict persists, this level of commitment will be increasingly challenging to maintain. In addition, **working to build the capacity of volunteers and organisations** – particularly those who are operating in occupied territories – **is a key area** where international organisations can work to strengthen technical capacities to manage the influx of international aid and support. NP has a security and evacuation focused program concept note that speaks to these needs, available on request.

This response provides a unique opportunity for the international community to uphold the commitments made in the Grand Bargain to pursue localisation in aid efforts. Ukraine is a middle-income country with a diverse and dynamic civil society that has responded with speed and efficiency to one of the largest displacements in history. Thus, with a severe economic recession on the horizon, creative solutions must be sought by donors to sustain this extraordinarily effective response, which was almost exclusively achieved without the presence of international humanitarian organisations. Central to that is recognising the diffuse nature of the response and working to fund networks within civil society, **ensuring a blanket approach to support**, as opposed to targeting a select group of national NGOs that have a more standardised project management approach.

In addition, while many local actors indicate that there is significant local capacity that international actors need not undermine or sideline, there is also an acknowledgement of the **deep strain that is placed on civilian volunteers** who are conducting this challenging and often dangerous work of supporting evacuations. One of them mentioned that they have scaled up from 50 to 150 staff in the course of a few months that need to be supported and trained. Many of them have conducted this work without payment, while losing their pre-war sources of income, not to mention the prevalence of trauma and burnout. Mental health support has been cited as a key need for first responders.

2. Security management capacity of local groups

We looked specifically at the self-protection capacities of the various youth groups and volunteer networks. Some groups had put an impressive amount of standard operating procedures and contingency plans in place, including safe houses, evacuation points, storage of food in evacuation points, alternative shelters in the form of tents, trauma kits and coordination with local health centres. Others acknowledged that their level of safety and security knowledge and practice was limited, and expressed a desire for capacity-building in these areas.

One person mentioned she was glad she had received basic mine risk education training and hoped all her volunteers would be able to recognise unexploded ordinance (UXOs), especially if those volunteers would move into liberated areas. She also mentioned that people should pay more attention to emotional safety, not merely immediate needs and hard security: "We need more than just food". Other local groups made clear requests for Early Warning Early Response capacity building, psychological first aid trainings, and other opportunities to improve community safety using unarmed approaches. **There is clear space and need for capacity building relating to safety, both personal and practical.**

3. Relations between host and displaced communities

Many people interviewed during the assessment raised concerns about ongoing relationships between host and displaced communities, and this was identified as a major area where ongoing support from third-party international organisations is welcome. Many people involved in the humanitarian response in Lviv, for example, suggested that the East, having been occupied and under Russian influence for longer periods, is more linguistically and culturally Russian. Interviewees were concerned that as a result, in the longer term ("a matter of months", suggested one interviewee), tensions may develop between those who have been displaced and host communities in Western Ukraine.

In addition, there is a need to closely **monitor and to be ready to engage with communities** in the East in the event of a Russian loss, where relations with separatist elements already active in these regions are likely to spark ongoing intercommunal conflict.

Inter-family conflict was already being reported during this assessment as a result of these tensions. Some groups have already community-driven neighbourhood networks that are activated to enhance security response as well as mediate tensions. These networks were established for mitigating neighbourhood conflicts, not armed conflict. While they have made a rapid transformation, these networks could be supported to scale up their efforts and prepare for dealing with larger conflicts and violence in their cities and areas.

4. Protection mainstreaming

With a heavily volunteer based response, there is naturally a lack of ongoing specialist protection risk analysis within some organisations and centres. Over the course of the assessment, some protection **concerns related to civilian consent, data privacy and security**, and 'do no harm' were noted and reported to relevant partner organisations. This includes local actors receiving grants from international organisations. There is a clear role for protection organisations to play in supporting the ongoing humanitarian response with protection mainstreaming, and more specialised protection related capacity building.

5. Humanitarian response and neutrality

Many of the volunteers, collective centres, and organisations active in the humanitarian response in Ukraine are simultaneously providing support for armed Ukrainian actors, including the military and territorial defence units. The national military mobilisation currently underway in Ukraine means that the humanitarian response is highly militarised, and that lines between civilian and military needs are blurred.

Some human rights activists or actors who had previously been involved in nonviolent resistance have now joined the military. Youth groups are engaged with manufacturing military equipment. This presents an obvious **challenge for international humanitarian actors and their partners in maintaining neutrality**. However, this is also an opportunity for partnership on protection mainstreaming and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) with volunteer centres and civil society.

6. Working within the Triple Nexus

It is crucial that approaches to protection reflect and emphasise the the Triple Nexus (the interlinkages between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming). With the emphasis at this time firmly focused on emergency humanitarian programming, there is a need for responses that also **embed peacebuilding practices and principles**. Moving forward, it is important that community infrastructures are involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of localised ceasefires or security agreements as they emerge.

7. Disconnect between local actors and broader humanitarian architecture

While there is coordination amongst many volunteer groups, much of their knowledge is not being fed into the broader humanitarian architecture. As a result, opportunities to provide additional support for local response are being missed. Though the Protection Cluster and others are taking steps to invite local organisations into conversation and coordination, many local actors question this approach. They have expressed desire for a **more forward leaning humanitarian response**, one that is in service of local groups and speaks their language, not the other way around. Facilitating connections between actors at different levels should be a key area of focus as the response develops.

8. Programming gaps

In addition, some specific protection needs emerge in relation to evacuations, trafficking, prison populations, and protection assessments and data analysis. These are all areas where local actors have expressed desire for support from international organisations. Separate analysis is available on these topics on request.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NP CALLS FOR

01

Upscaling of flexible small-grant mechanisms and other resourcing

02

Investment in support focused on safety and security of civil society

03

Humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts focused on relationship-building

04

Protection mainstreaming training

05

Implementation of humanitarian principles

06

Prioritisation of the leadership of local Ukrainian organisations

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

URGENT ACTION

There are a number of actions that the international community can take to address the protection concerns outlined above. Fostering an integrated response in which local efforts are supported and complimented by international action is essential.

To that end, we call for:

1. An upscaling of flexible small-grant mechanisms and other resourcing, capacity-strengthening, and mentoring support for civil society groups, local organisations, and volunteers currently mobilised as part of the local humanitarian response;
2. In particular, an investment in support focused on safety and security of civil society and volunteers engaged in frontline humanitarian efforts, including evacuations from occupied areas. Specifically, requests for training and support have been made by local groups for psychological first aid, Early Warning Early Response planning, and unarmed civilian protection practices.
3. Support for pro-active, forward leaning, cross-cutting humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts focused on relationship-building and mediation between host communities and displaced civilians, and other future efforts such as inclusive ceasefire and peace agreement negotiations;
4. Support for protection mainstreaming training, including related to humanitarian data security, to ensure the safety of both displaced civilians and humanitarian volunteers;
5. International support on implementation of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law with volunteer centres and civil society;
6. Recognition of the leadership of local Ukrainian organisations and volunteers in the humanitarian response, and continued prioritisation of this leadership in the context of international efforts.



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