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# MANDATORY EVACUATIONS OF CIVILIANS IN KHERSON OBLAST

EMERGENCY RESPONSE



(C) SylNiBoVilni

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## CONTEXT

In September 2023, the Defence Council of Kherson Oblast announced mandatory evacuation of families with children from dozens of frontline settlements that had been under constant artillery fire from Russian Forces (RF). Due to the immense risk to civilians, a recommendation to evacuate had already been made, since August. As shelling intensified over the weeks, that recommendation was made mandatory.

RF have controlled areas in the Kherson region south of the Dniepr river since March 2022. They continue to regularly shell the city of Kherson which they occupied for nine months until Ukrainian Forces (UF) re-took control of the city in November 2022. Civilians in both frontline settlements and in Kherson city live under constant shelling, disrupting their daily lives and inciting fear.

In coordination with the Oblast authorities, evacuations from the Dar'ivka Hromada are facilitated by local volunteers. At the time of reporting, 88 children and their carers are waiting to be evacuated from three settlements in the Hromada. Temporary housing has been arranged in Kherson, Kryvyi Rih, Mykolaiv, and Odesa cities.

Civilians still residing in Dar'ivka - the elderly, people with special needs, single-headed households - have not previously been able to evacuate due to pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as lack of financial means, loss of personal documentation, ongoing hostilities, lack of information on the available humanitarian services in areas of displacement and distrust in the availability of said services and accommodation.

*My mother is still in Mykil's'ke. We are so worried about her. We had to leave so rapidly and I do not know who is going to take care of her. We have never left our village before - a displaced resident of Kherson speaking from Mykolaiv.*



# RESPONSE

(C) Spravzhni

On 21st and 22nd of September, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) team facilitated civilian evacuations from Dar'ivka Hromada. On the 21st, NP received a call from a focal point in Mykil's'ke about two families in need of an evacuation following a terrifying night of constant and heavy shelling by RF. NP, in partnership with Syl'niBoVilni, a local volunteer collective, facilitated the evacuation.

In coordination with the police, NP and Syl'niBoVilni accompanied 3 adults and 2 minors to NP's safe accommodation in Kherson city. Syl'niBoVilni escorted 1 mother and her daughter, 14 years old, onwards to Mykolaiv. NP team made sure 'wrap around protection' services (such as, information dissemination on the available services, hibernation kits, and safe shelter space) were provided to families residing at its safe accommodation in Kherson.

On September 22nd, NP team supported the evacuation of another two families. This time, NP and Syl'niBoVilni were joined by Spravzhni, another local volunteer collective operating in Kherson Oblast.



*(C) Spravzhni. Civilians pictured with the volunteers and the police*

Spravzhni and SylniBoVilni, in coordination with the police, arranged for the two families - 6 people in total (including 3 children; all under the age of 15) to be transported via boat from Mykil's'ke to Dar'ivka. The volunteers then accompanied civilians to Mykolaiv where, another of NP's local partners, Perspektyva, provided the families with temporary shelter. Although the evacuation took place along the safest route, it was actively shelled during the evacuation. Despite the danger, the volunteers kept the civilians calm and continued the journey to move them to safety.

NP has reached out to both international and local partners to come up with a joint response, as the mandatory evacuations are ongoing. 90% of urgent requests for support put forward are attended by local volunteer networks.

# WAYS FORWARD

This case study, and the actions taken by NP, SylNiBoVilni, and Spravzhni, underscore the urgent needs of civilians in the region, and hold important lessons about the way forward for humanitarian responses for humanitarian responders, including:



Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - inclusive of flak jackets and helmets - urgently needs to be provided both to volunteers facilitating evacuations and civilians, including adapted kits for children. Quality visibility is essential for vehicles used in evacuations.



Information on the essential humanitarian services made available in areas of displacement needs to be provided to the affected communities prior evacuation to inform their decision-making.



Evacuations require a rapid, well-coordinated response. International actors share the responsibility and risk burden to facilitate safe and rapid movement in partnership with and support of local volunteers.



Continuation of services needs to be ensured once civilians reach temporary accommodation and seek out essential humanitarian services to prevent premature returns and protection concerns.



Local volunteers conducting civilian evacuations need to be supported when planning their movements to ensure the necessary security backstops are put in place. Well-maintained and fueled vehicles are a prerequisite.



Communication between displaced persons and community members still having to evacuate needs to be promoted in order to build trust and encourage civilians still at high risk to move to safety.