

Critical Supply Chains Monitoring:

Medicine availability assessment

September 2024 | Ukraine, Sumy Region

Context

Since 2022, the Sumy Region has been deeply affected by the ongoing conflict, particularly due to its location on the northeastern border with Russia. In the early months of the war, part of the country's southeastern territory came under Russian control, leading to widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and significant disruptions to essential services. Health facilities, including hospitals and clinics, suffered extensive damage from shelling and airstrikes, leaving many communities without access to basic healthcare. As of March 2024, the number of partially damaged healthcare facilities in the Sumy region reached 32, and 3 medical facilities had been completely destroyed.¹

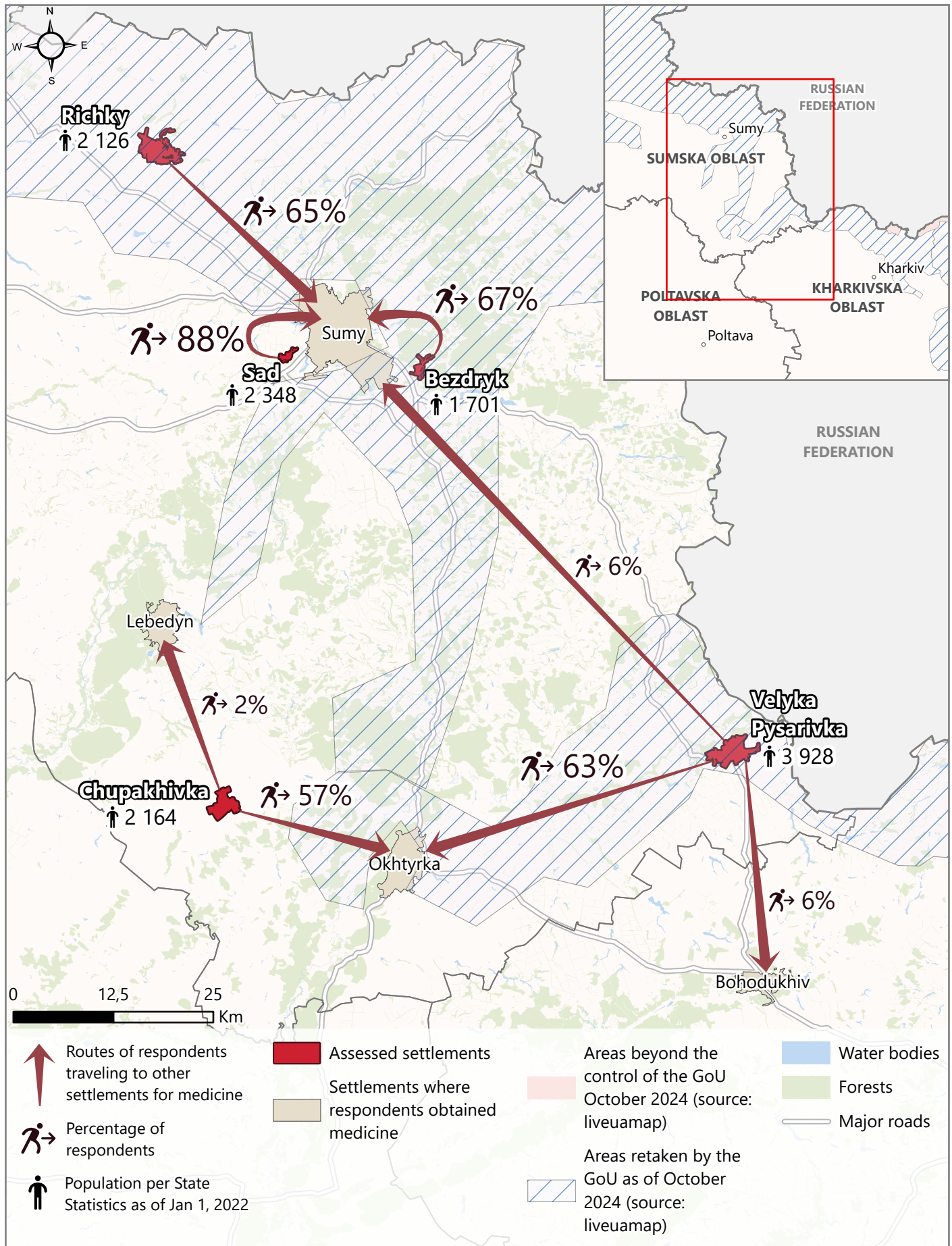
In April 2022, the Ukrainian army regained control over the entire region. Following the de-occupation, efforts to restore all sectors of life resumed with the support of humanitarian organizations. However, this process proved particularly challenging in frontline settlements, where periodic shelling continued to disrupt recovery efforts.

The situation worsened in mid-2024 when a cross-border offensive escalated hostilities, bringing renewed shelling and airstrikes to the region. This further damaged infrastructure, including health facilities, and challenged humanitarian aid efforts. According to the Regional Administration, between the announcement of the start of evacuation on August 6 and September 2024, about 22,000 people were evacuated from the frontline settlements of the region.²

In frontline communities and hard-to-reach areas, there is reduced availability of medicine due to the closure of pharmacies and damage to healthcare facilities. Health partners continue to support local health services through donations of essential medications to healthcare facilities in frontline communities, despite the challenges posed by restricted humanitarian access.³

Key findings

- Cost and travel barriers:** Across multiple settlements, affordability and the need to travel to other towns (e.g., Sumy or Okhtyrka) for medicines are significant challenges. In Richky, for example, half of the respondents reported having to travel to the regional center due to shortages of specific medicines.
- Humanitarian aid plays a crucial role:** In several settlements, such as Bezdryk and Velyka Pysarivka, the availability of medicines is heavily reliant on the receipt and distribution of humanitarian supplies. Frequent shelling and delivery disruptions have made it difficult to maintain a stable supply, further highlighting the importance of external support in these areas.
- Access to medicines is mostly maintained locally:** In several settlements like Chupakhivka and Sad, local pharmacies remain operational, and access to medicines has not been severely disrupted despite the ongoing conflict. However, there are still concerns about the lack of certain medications in some areas.
- Low utilization of the affordable medicines program:** In almost every settlement, only a few respondents reported accessing the "Affordable Medicines" program (AMP), suggesting either a lack of awareness, limited availability of the program's medicines, or other barriers preventing broader usage. This is a consistent issue, especially in frontline areas like Velyka Pysarivka, where none of the respondents accessed the program.



Map 1. Assessed settlements with destinations and numbers of respondents seeking medicine in the Sumy Region

Rationale & Methodology

This assessment aims to evaluate the current state of medicine availability across settlements in the Sumy Region, focusing on frontline, de-occupied, and rural areas. By identifying settlements where there is limited availability/accessibility of medicines and the categories of medicines affected, this assessment will inform decision making by the Health Cluster, humanitarian organizations and local authorities. The findings will contribute to the development of targeted interventions to restore and improve access to essential medicines, ensuring that vulnerable groups such as the elderly, chronically ill, and displaced people receive the care they need.

To achieve the assessment objectives, five settlements in the Sumy Region were selected through an analysis of Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) data and consultations with the Health Cluster team.⁴ The settlements were chosen since February 2022, three of these settlements, namely, Bezdryk, Chupakhivka and Velyka Pysarivka have been partially or fully under temporary military control by the Russian Federation. In all

five locations, interviews were conducted with heads of primary care centers, along with 188 households that were likely to rely on medication for chronic or life-threatening conditions.

Household survey participants were identified through local referrals, where residents provided contact information of potential respondents. This led to the formation of a respondent-driven sample, allowing for further expansion of contacts. While the use of respondent-driven sampling and the sample size means that the results should be viewed as indicative rather than representative, combining insights from both patients and healthcare providers offers a more comprehensive understanding of access to medicines in the targeted areas. The questionnaire consists primarily of quantitative questions, with a few open-ended ones to allow respondents to share additional opinions. Data collection was conducted between August 26 and September 9, 2024.

Findings

Chupakhivka

Number of surveys: 47 + 1 KI

Average age of respondents: 50

Chupakhivka is a relatively small settlement in the south of Sumska oblast, approximately 60 km from the border with Russia, with an estimated pre-war population of 2,164 (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, January 2022).⁵ Among the settlements studied, the situation in terms of medicine availability is of the least concern. The Key Informant (KI) reported that access to medicines has not been affected by the full-scale invasion with the pharmacy remaining open. They also noted that there are no obstacles to the procurement of medicines by the primary health care facility in Chupakhivka.

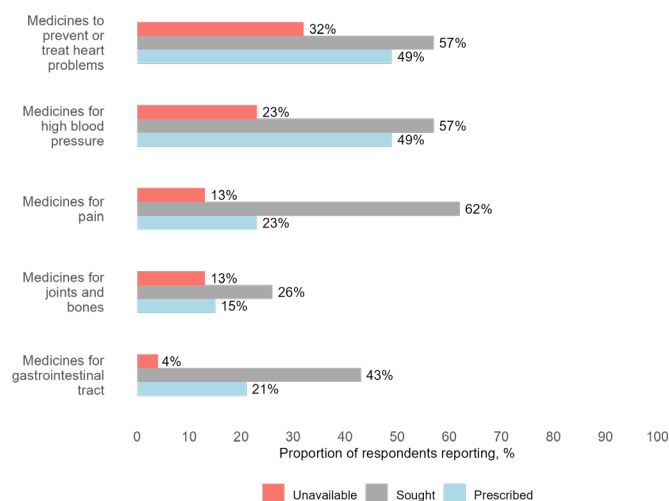
Comparison of Prescriptions and Redemptions: Chupakhivka



All 47 households confirmed the presence of a pharmacy, some mentioned the possibility of accessing medicines

at a polyclinic (5), and one respondent reported obtaining medicine through the Ukrposhta delivery service. According to ActivityInfo*, no Health Cluster partners were present in Chupakhivka in July and August.

Medicines Sought, Prescribed, and Unavailable in Chupakhivka



Nearly a third of HHs (14) reported cost as a barrier to accessing medicines and the KI confirmed this, expressing the view that unaffordability constitutes the main barriers to accessing medicines. One HH respondent reported that medicines can be purchased at lower prices in Lebedyn and Okhtyrka. In this regard, it is noteworthy that only three of the HHs reported having accessed medicines through the "Affordable Medicines" program** in the last two months, two of which in another settlement, suggesting the local pharmacy either does not participate in the program or has a very limited supply of AMP medicines.

When asked about medicines meeting expectations, 5 respondents reported that the medication was not effective, leading to dissatisfaction with quality. However, 35 respondents were generally satisfied with the quantity and quality of medicines.

**The ActivityInfo database is utilized for reporting partners' activities and progress toward targets for the humanitarian health response in Ukraine*

***The "Affordable Medicines" program provides patients in Ukraine with access to essential medications for chronic diseases through government-funded subsidies.*

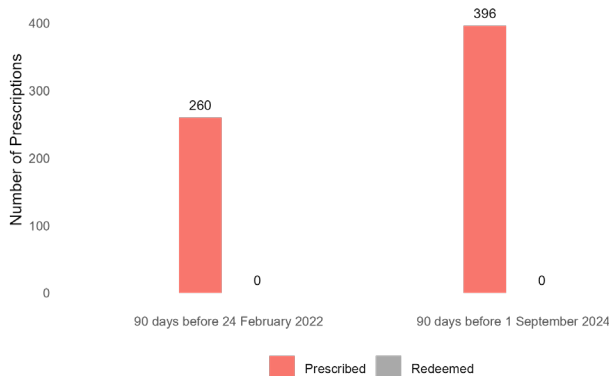
Sad

Number of surveys: 31 + 1 KI

Average age of respondents: 51

With an estimated pre-war population of 2,348 (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, January 2022), Sad is another relatively small settlement, situated to the southeast of the city of Sumy. According to a key informant, access to medicines in the Sad is comparable to February 2022. There is reportedly no issues with the procurement of medicines, although the KI indicated the need for a greater number of pharmacies to enhance the availability of medicines.

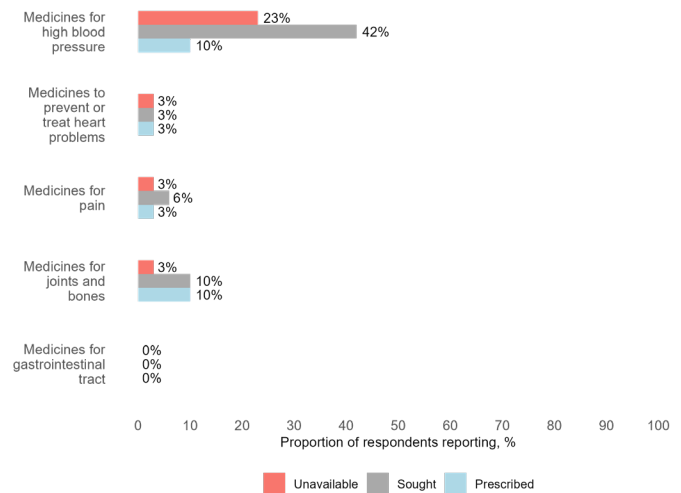
Comparison of Prescriptions and Redemptions: Sad



There seemed to be some confusion about the presence of medicine providers in the settlements: 8 respondents and the KI indicated the presence of a pharmacy, while about a third of respondents (10) mentioned that there was no pharmacy in the settlement, which is supported by National Health Service of Ukraine (NHSU) data.⁶ Apart from the pharmacy, 10 households reported medicines could be accessed at the primary health care center, confirmed by NHSU data. Most surprisingly, and despite the fact that all respondents reported needing medicines in the previous two months, 13 respondents reported that they didn't know where medicines could be accessed—far more than any other settlement assessed.

Almost half of the respondents (14) informed that they had no obstacles in accessing medicines, but the other half (16) faced a lack of specific types of medicines. The KI noted that there are no major problems in accessing medicines for the residents of Sad.

Medicines Sought, Prescribed, and Unavailable in Sad



Since the settlement is located close to the regional center, in case of the absence of medicines in the local pharmacy, residents can go to the city. This is confirmed by the respondents, as 27 reported that over the past 2 months they had traveled to the city of Sumy to search for the necessary medicines. The vast majority (29) of respondents answered that they had not used the "Affordable Medicines" program in the last 2 months.

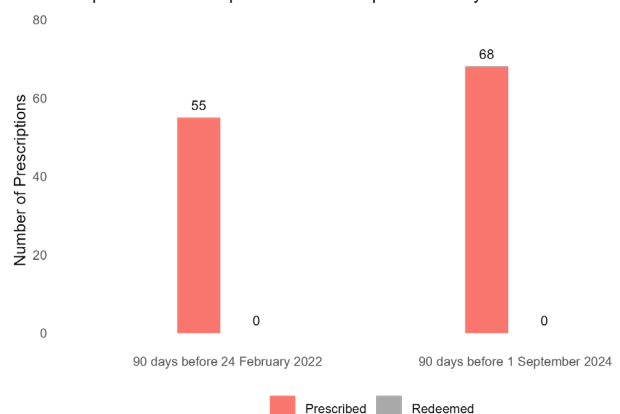
Richky

Number of surveys: 40 + 1 KI

Average age of respondents: 55

The relatively small settlement of Richky, located northwest of Sumy and approximately 12 kilometers from the Russian border, has an estimated pre-war population of 2,126. According to KI, access to medicines in Richky remains largely unchanged since February 2022. However, due to ongoing shelling, only two out of ten pharmacies are still operational. KI also noted that they almost do not use medicines in their activities and ensure the availability of a minimum set for emergency care. The primary challenge in procurement is the lack of sufficient funds.

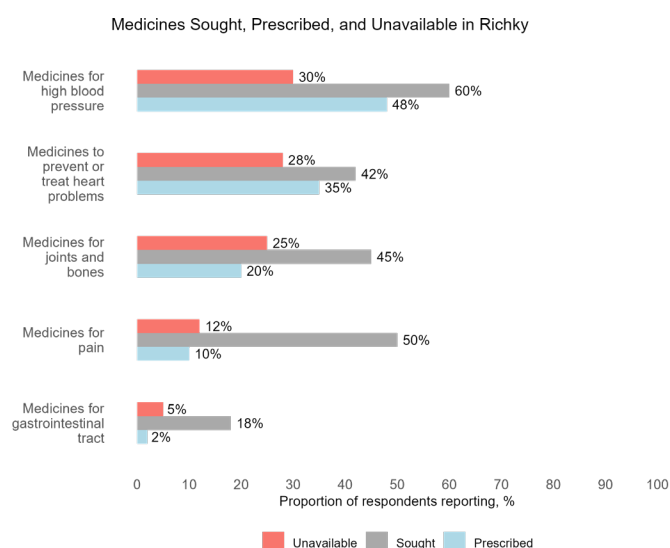
Comparison of Prescriptions and Redemptions: Richky



The majority of respondents (28) confirmed the availability of medicines in pharmacies, with some (6) also citing availability in health facilities. However, several

respondents (5) reported no access to medicines, with one individual obtaining their medication through the Ukrposhta delivery service. According to ActivityInfo, Health Cluster partners have not conducted activities in Richky.

While nearly half of the respondents (19) reported no barriers to accessing medicines, the other half cited various challenges, including security concerns when traveling to pharmacies or health facilities (17), confidence in the absence of medicine providers (6), unaffordable costs (5), and shortages of specific medicines (5). Due to these shortages, more than half of the respondents (26) had to travel to the regional center to obtain necessary medications.



Only four respondents reported accessing medicines under the "Affordable Medicines" program in Richky over the past two months.

Bezdryk

Number of surveys: 21 + 1 KI

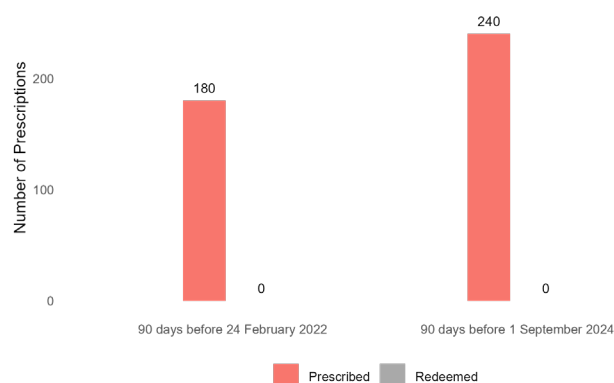
Average age of respondents: 49

Bezdryk is the smallest settlement among those studied in the Sumy region, with a population size of 1701 inhabitants, according to the State Statistics Service. The settlement is located southeast of the regional center, less than 30 kilometers from the border with Russia. According to KI, the availability of medicines in the settlement is helped by the receive and distribution of humanitarian medicines, because the opening of a private stationary pharmacy turned out to be unprofitable. KI also states that their health facility does not experience problems with procurement, and the volume of stocks of medicines for first aid remains at the level of three-month needs. However, according to KI, medications for regulating blood sugar and treating nervous system disorders remain unavailable or in insufficient quantities.

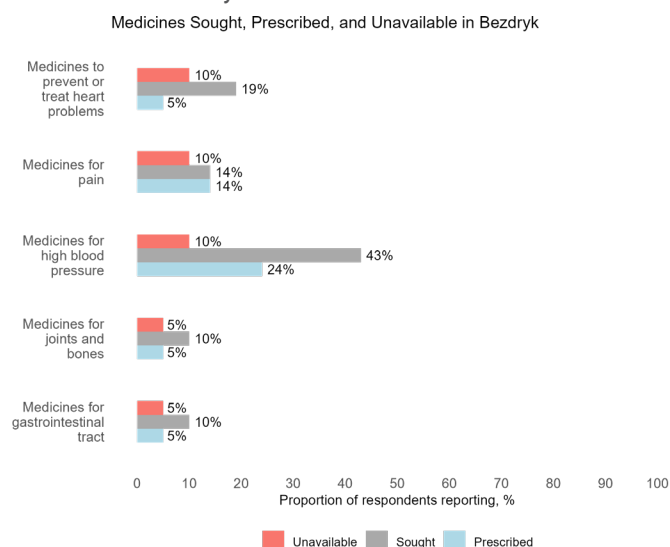
The majority of respondents (18) and KI confirmed that medicines are primarily accessible at the local primary

healthcare center, which aligns with data from the National Health Service of Ukraine. However, some respondents were unaware of how to access medicines or reported complete unavailability. According to ActivityInfo data, Health Cluster partners did not operate in Bezdryk in July and August.

Comparison of Prescriptions and Redemptions: Bezdryk



Among the surveyed residents, most (16) indicated no major barriers to obtaining medicines, although some noted difficulties in finding specific medicines or affording their costs. KI acknowledged that, in cases of serious illness, residents often rely on humanitarian aid for free medicines or travel to Sumy, which is relatively accessible, being only 10 kilometers away.



Notably, only three respondents obtained medicines through the "Affordable Medicines" program, two of whom did so in another settlement, likely due to limited availability in Bezdryk. Over the past two months, 16 respondents traveled to Sumy for specific medications, with 13 seeking non-prescription medicine.

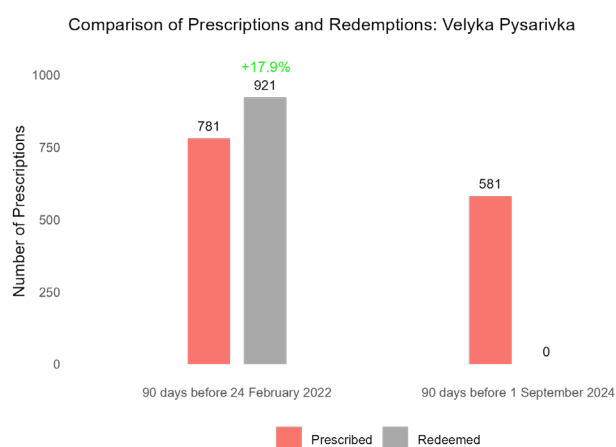
Velyka Pysarivka

Number of surveys: 49 + 1 KI

Average age of respondents: 54

Velyka Pysarivka is a frontline settlement situated in the southeast of the Sumy Region, just 6 kilometers from the Russian border, making it the settlement with the most

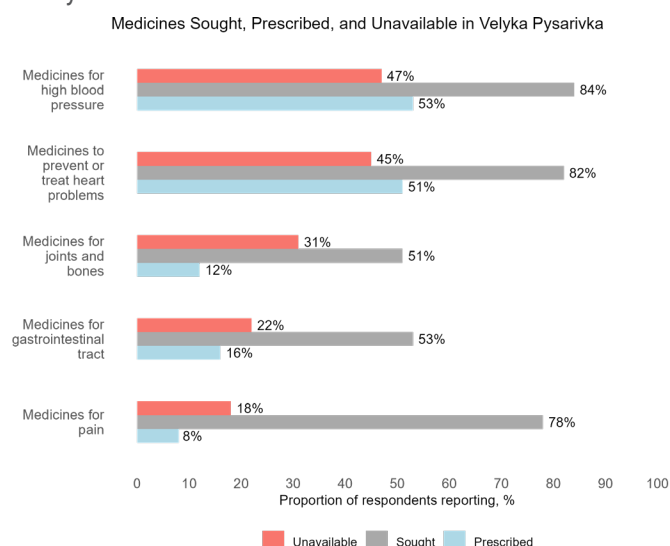
critical concerns regarding medicine availability among those studied. According to the State Statistics Service, as of January 1, 2022, the population stood at 3,928. KI highlighted a significant contrast between the availability of medicines before February 2022 and the current situation.



Access to medicines is severely restricted, with frequent delivery disruptions due to ongoing shelling. Despite this, the KI noted no issues in procuring medicines for the regular operations of the local primary healthcare center. The KI also reported a lack of medicine suppliers in the settlement, although 41 respondents indicated the presence of a static pharmacy. Upon clarification, respondents referred to a small private pharmacy operating only a few hours per week from a room in one of the administrative buildings. Six respondents reported a complete absence of medicines in the settlement. According to the National Health Service of Ukraine, there are officially three pharmacies in Velyka Pysarivka, but this information likely dates back to the pre-war period. ActivityInfo data shows

no Health Cluster partner activities in Velyka Pysarivka during July and August.

Despite the presence of the small, makeshift pharmacy, 46 respondents highlighted the dangers of traveling to obtain medicines, 33 felt unsafe within the pharmacy/health facility, and 25 noted that the cost of medicines was prohibitive. Due to these challenges, 40 respondents sought medicines in other cities, with most part (31) traveling to Okhtyrka.



None of the respondents had access to medicines under the "Affordable Medicines" program, and 12 mentioned obtaining such medicines from other settlements over the past two months. One respondent indicated a lack of knowledge about how to use the "Affordable Medicines" program.

Endnotes

1. WHO, **HeRAMS Ukraine Status update report**, March 2024
2. UNHCR, **Only minutes to pack: thousands of evacuees flee to safety from the worst war-affected areas in Ukraine**, September 2024
3. WHO, **Ukraine: Health Cluster Bulletin #8**, August 2024
4. REACH, **Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM)**, March 2024
5. STATISTICS UKRAINE, **Number of Present Population of Ukraine**, January 2022
6. [Analytical dashboards of the National Health Service of Ukraine](#)