

# Medicine Availability in Frontline Areas of Ukraine: Synthesis Report

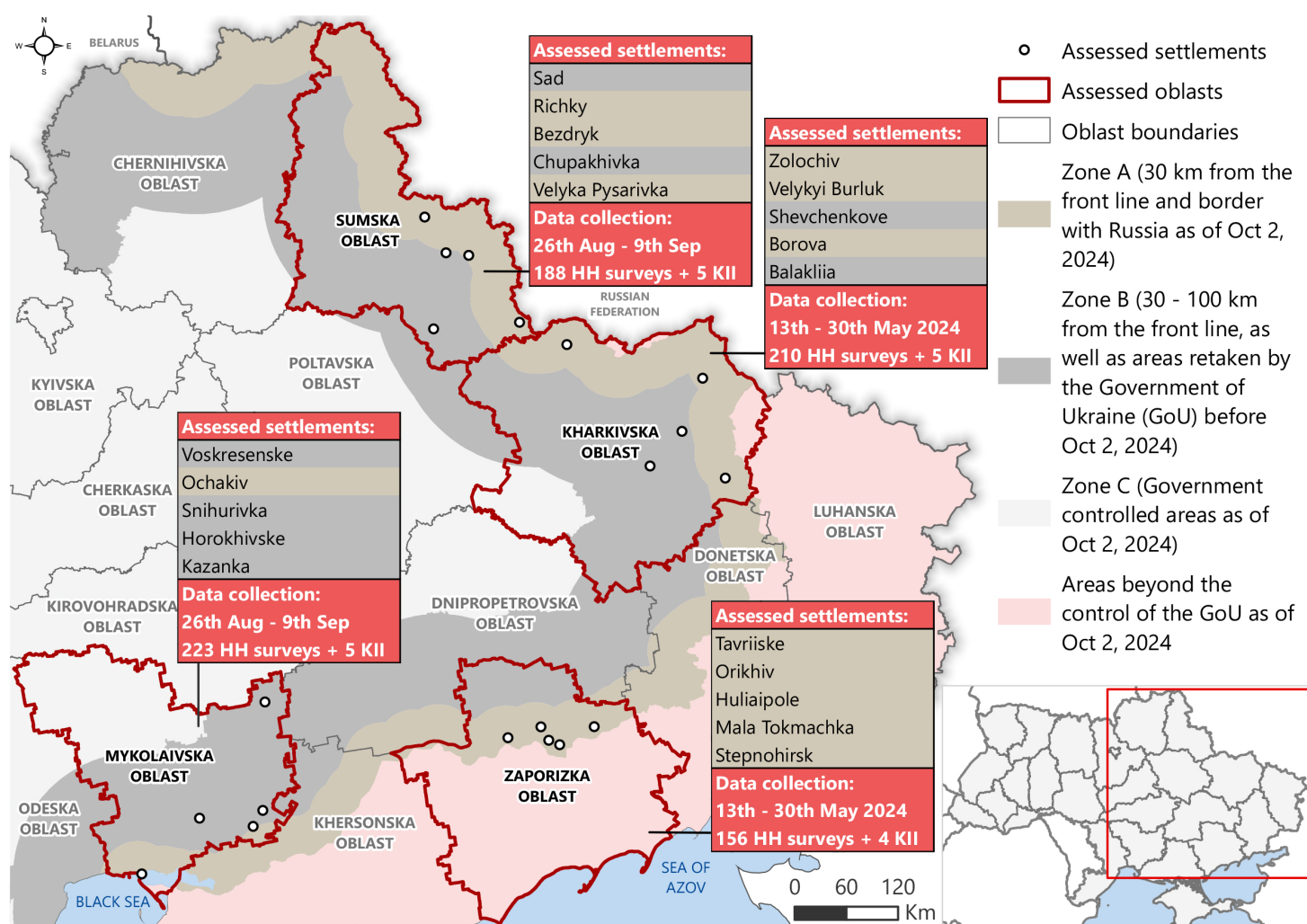
January 2025 | Ukraine

## Assessment Rationale and Objective

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022, Ukraine has faced significant challenges in maintaining access to essential healthcare services in conflict-affected areas. The availability of medicines, a critical component of healthcare, has been disrupted across frontline and de-occupied oblasts.<sup>1</sup> This has been further exacerbated by supply chain disruption caused by damaged infrastructure, logistical barriers, and ongoing hostilities, especially in areas close to the frontlines.

To better understand the challenges related to medicine availability, REACH, in collaboration with the Health Cluster and regional Departments of Health, conducted assessments in selected settlements across four frontline oblasts of Ukraine: Kharkivska, Zaporizka, Mykolaivska, and Sumaska. The objectives of these assessments are to identify barriers to accessing medicines, highlight trends across the oblasts, and provide actionable insights to improve medicine availability and access in conflict-affected areas.

This synthesis report highlights the key findings from these assessments, focusing on the major trends and challenges affecting medicine availability and access. It aims to support humanitarian and government actors with evidence-based decision-making towards addressing gaps in medicine availability in conflict-affected areas.



## Methodology

To assess the availability of medicines in conflict-affected areas of Ukraine, surveys with people in need of medicines and key informant interviews (KIIs) at healthcare facility levels, were conducted across four oblasts: Kharkivska, Zaporizka, Mykolaivska, and Sumska. Settlements within these oblasts were selected based on data from REACH’s Humanitarian Situation Monitoring,<sup>2</sup> and consultations with the Health Cluster and regional Departments of Health. The assessments focused on frontline, de-occupied, and rural areas, using respondent-driven sampling to reach populations most likely to rely on medications for chronic or life-threatening conditions.

The assessments targeted categories of medicines included in the "Affordable Medicine" Program\*, and most commonly prescribed. The assessments did not include any categories of non-evidence-based products that can be prescribed or available over the counter at the pharmacy.

In total, 777 household surveys and 19 KIIs were conducted across the four oblasts. This mixed-method approach combined quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from healthcare providers, ensuring a general indicative understanding of medicine availability and barriers to access. Data collection occurred at different times, meaning results across oblasts are contextual rather than directly comparable.

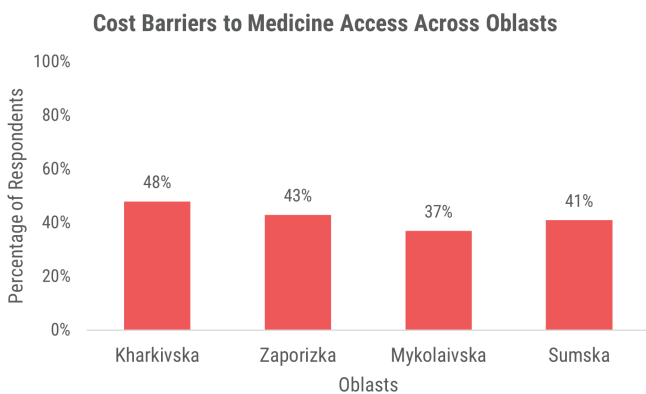
## Main Findings and Trends Across Assessed Areas

The medicine availability assessments reveal challenges and localized trends in access to essential medications amidst ongoing conflict. While humanitarian efforts have mitigated some barriers, significant gaps persist, particularly in frontline and de-occupied settlements.

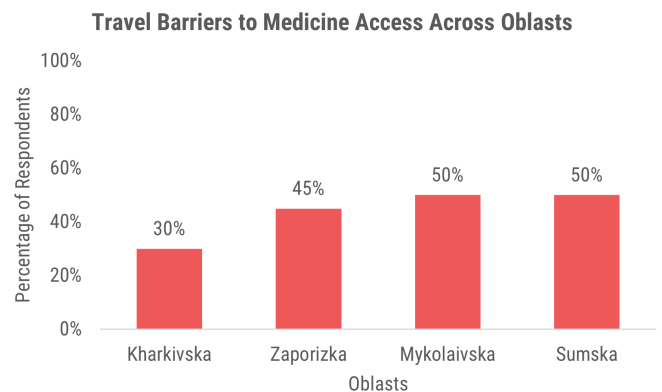
### Key Findings

#### 1. Barriers to Accessing Medicines:

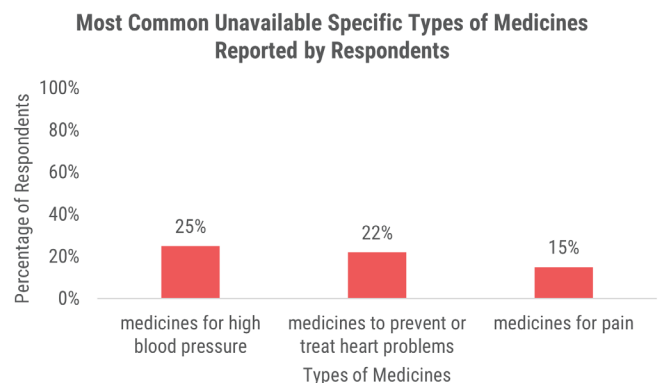
- **Affordability:** High medication costs are a widespread issue, cited by respondents across all regions, particularly in Sumy’s Velyka Pysarivka and Mykolaiv’s settlements like Kazanka.



- **Travel and Safety Concerns:** Residents of many settlements report having to travel to nearby urban centers for medicines, risking safety due to ongoing shelling and logistical challenges. For instance, residents of Orikhiv (Zaporizka) and Richky (Sumska) face perilous conditions when seeking medicines.



- **Availability of Specific Medicines:** Commonly reported shortages include medicines for chronic conditions (e.g., hypertension, heart diseases, and diabetes) and pain management. These shortages were consistent across all oblasts assessed.



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

## 2. Infrastructure Damage and Health Service Functionality:

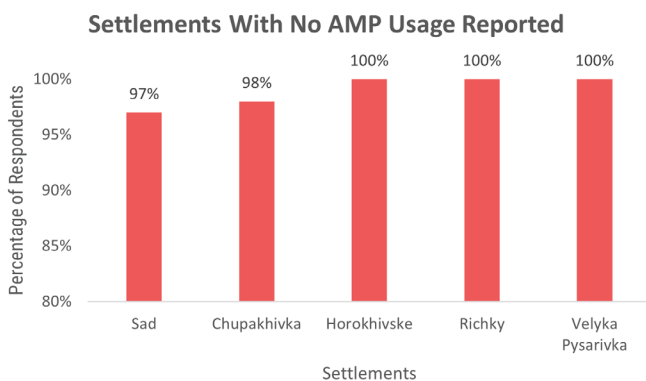
- Health facilities and pharmacies have suffered extensive damage, with many either partially functional or completely non-operational. This is particularly acute in frontline settlements like Mala Tokmachka (Zaporizka) and Velyka Pysarivka (Sumska), where few or no pharmacies are available.
- Even where facilities remain operational, disruptions to power supply, transport infrastructure and supply chains hinder their ability to meet population needs.

## 3. Role of Humanitarian Aid:

- Humanitarian interventions have been significant in stabilizing medicine availability, especially in de-occupied areas. Mobile pharmacies, outreach medical units\*, and donations to healthcare facilities, have filled critical gaps in oblasts like Kharkivska and Mykolaivska.

## 4. Utilization of "Affordable Medicines" Program:

- The "Affordable Medicines" program has provided partial relief but remains underutilized due to limited awareness, logistical challenges, or program limitations in remote and frontline settlements. Utilization was notably low during the assessment of this issue in Mykolaivska and Sumska oblasts. The chart shows the five settlements where respondents reported not using the "Affordable Medicine" Program in the two months prior to the survey:



## 5. Disparities in Access:

- Frontline and rural areas exhibit the greatest disparities in access compared to urban centers or oblasts further from conflict zones. Settlements like Snihurivka (Mykolaivska) and Balakliia (Kharkivska) report better access due to established pharmacies and integration of humanitarian efforts.

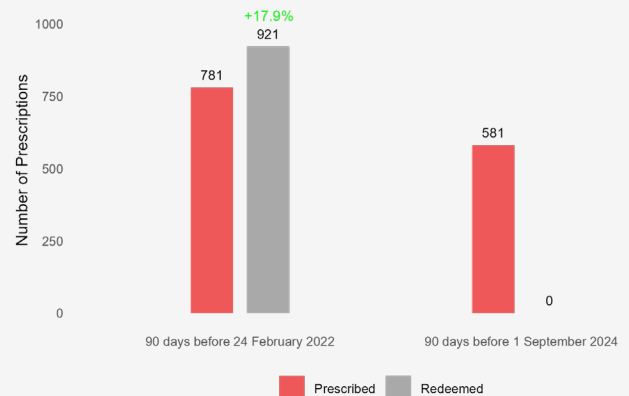
\*Based on reported health cluster partners monthly data on ActicityInfo platform

## Case in Point: Medicine Availability Challenges

An illustrative example of a settlement where residents face numerous obstacles in accessing medicines is Velyka Pysarivka, located in Sumska oblast.

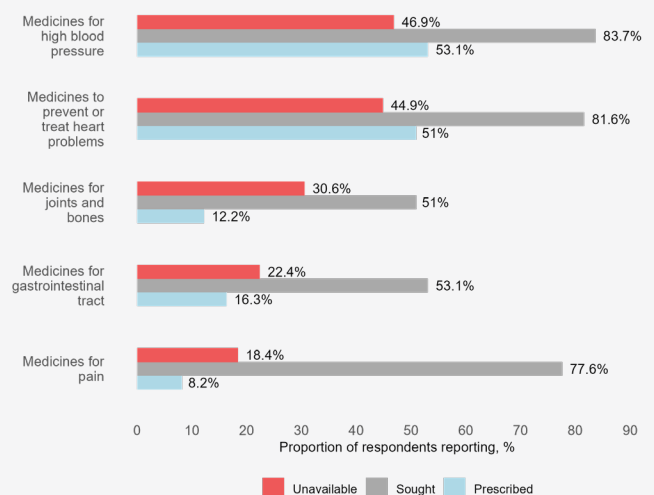
This frontline settlement in the southeast of Sumska oblast, lies just six kilometers from the Russian border and faces critical challenges in medicine availability. With a pre-war population of nearly four thousand, the settlement has seen a stark decline in access to medicines compared to before February 2022.<sup>3</sup>

Comparison of Prescriptions and Redemptions: Velyka Pysarivka



Frequent shelling disrupts deliveries, and while the local healthcare center maintains emergency stocks, overall access remains limited. Although many respondents noted the presence of a pharmacy, it operates only a few hours weekly from an administrative building. Official records list three pharmacies, but this is likely reflective of pre-war conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Medicines Sought, Prescribed, and Unavailable in Velyka Pysarivka



Safety concerns were a major issue, with many respondents highlighting the dangers of traveling for medicines and feeling unsafe even within local facilities. Cost and availability also pose significant barriers, forcing most residents to seek medicines in nearby cities like Okhtyrka.

The "Affordable Medicines" program was underutilized locally, with some residents unaware of how to access it.

## Observed Trends

### Diverging Access Across Oblasts:

Access to medicines varies significantly depending on proximity to conflict zones. Settlements further from the frontlines, such as Balakliia (Kharkivska) or Snihurivka (Mykolaivska), report relatively stable availability due to functioning pharmacies and humanitarian aid. In contrast, frontline areas like Velyka Pysarivka (Sumska) and Mala Tokmachka (Zaporizka) face severe shortages, limited facilities, and high safety risks.

### Shift Toward Mobile Solutions:

Mobile pharmacies and outreach medical units are increasingly critical in addressing medicine shortages, particularly in isolated or unsafe settlements. While effective in areas like Zaporizka, their reach remains uneven, highlighting the need for scaling up these services.

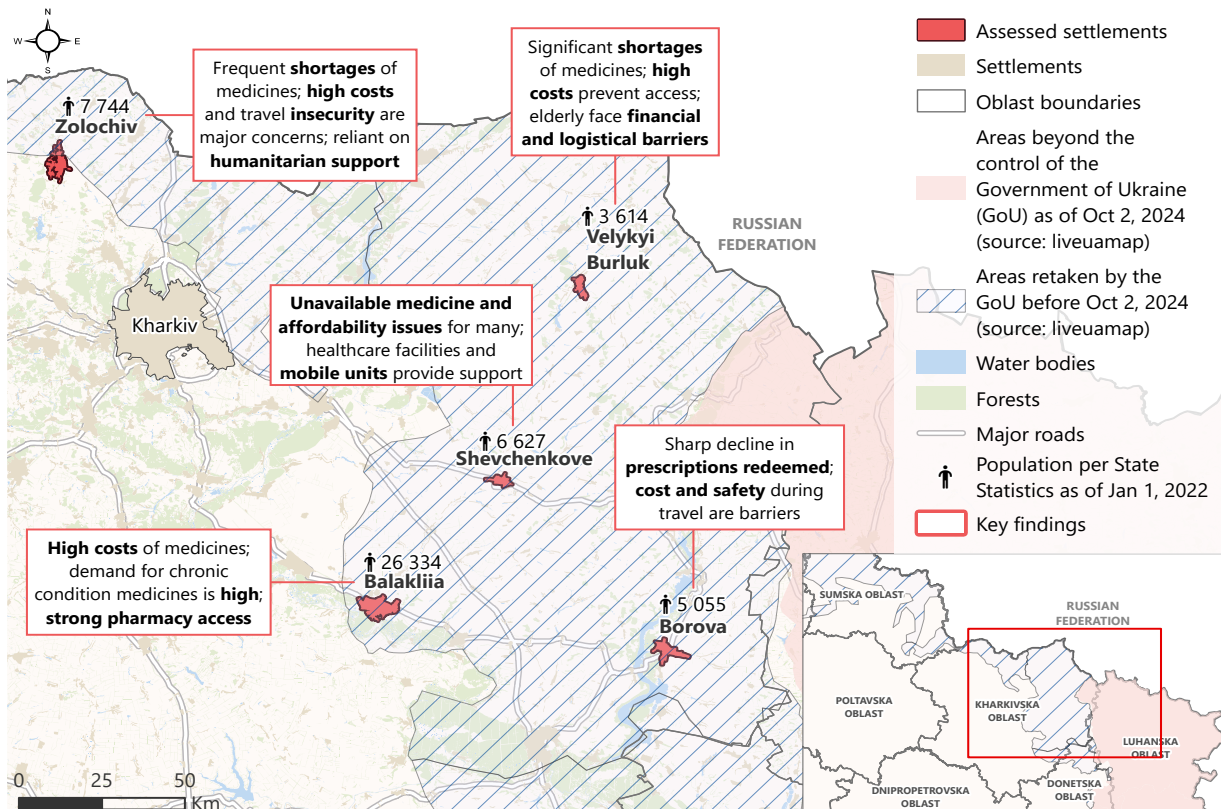
### Population Vulnerabilities:

Elderly residents and those with chronic conditions are disproportionately impacted by medicine shortages. These populations often lack the mobility or financial resources to travel for medicines, emphasizing the need for targeted support such as home delivery services or mobile outreach programs.

## Oblasts Key Features

The assessments across Kharkivska, Zaporizka, Mykolaivska and Sumska oblasts revealed both shared challenges and distinct features in medicine availability and access. These differences stem from varying levels of infrastructure damage, security risks, and the extent of humanitarian support.

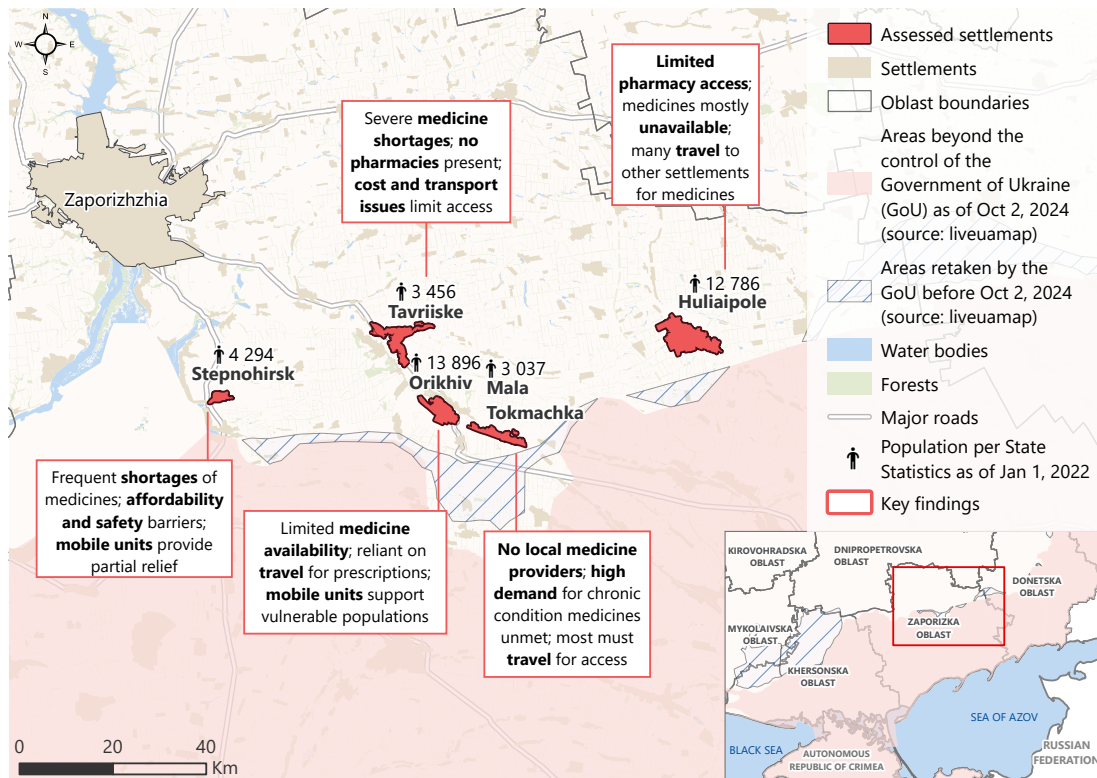
### Kharkivska Oblast



Map 2 - Key findings from assessed settlements in Kharkivska oblast

As a frontline oblast with significant infrastructure damage, Kharkivska faced severe disruptions in medicine supply during the early stages of the conflict. The deployment of mobile pharmacies has improved access in some areas, but cost remains a major barrier, particularly for chronic medications. Travel concerns also persist, especially in northern settlements exposed to ongoing shelling.

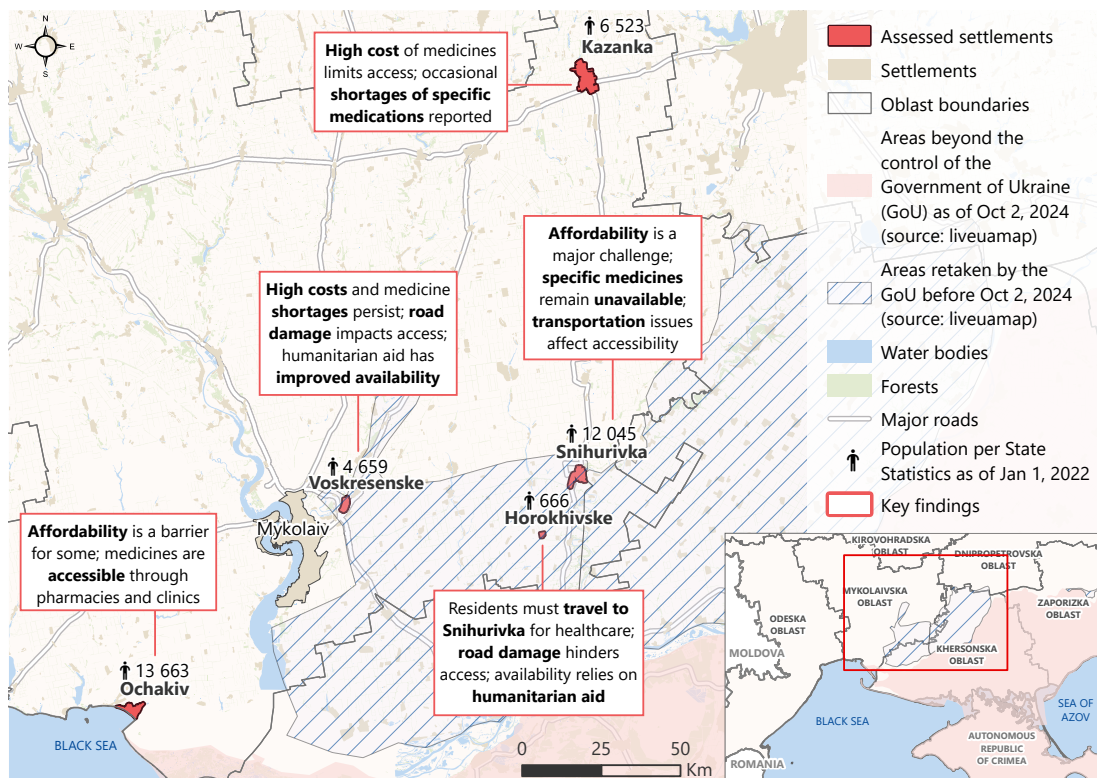
Zaporizka Oblast



Map 3 – Key findings from assessed settlements in Zaporizka oblast

Zaporizka’s proximity to active conflict zones has left settlements like Mala Tokmachka and Huliaipole grappling with critical shortages of essential medicines. The absence of operational pharmacies in some areas forces residents to travel to neighboring towns, often under dangerous conditions. Aid organizations play a pivotal role, with outreach medical units and medicine distribution efforts supporting residents.

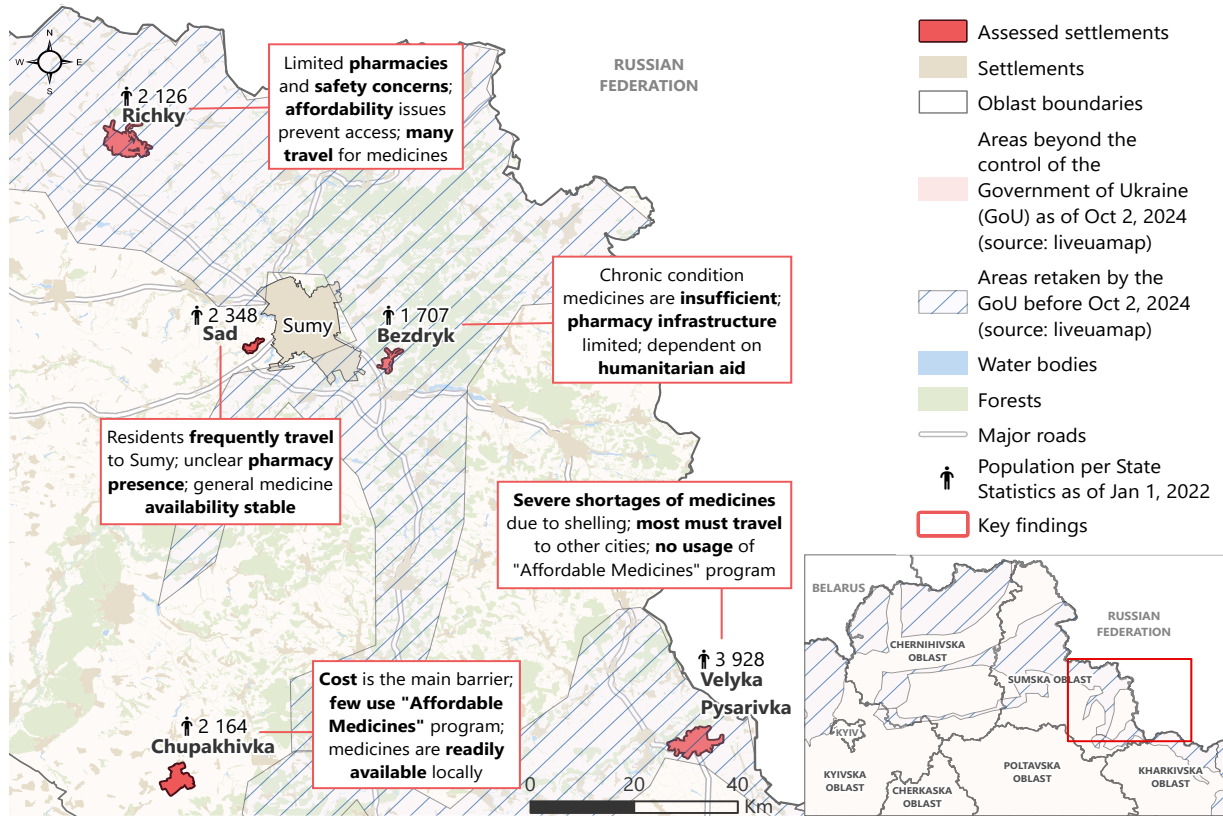
Mykolaivska Oblast



Map 4 – Key findings from assessed settlements in Mykolaivska oblast

Mykolaivska demonstrates a mix of resilience and ongoing challenges. In de-occupied areas such as Snihurivka and Ochakiv, humanitarian aid has stabilized medicine availability, with reports indicating access levels approaching pre-conflict conditions. However, damaged roads and high costs continue to hinder access in rural areas. The "Affordable Medicines" program shows higher engagement here compared to other oblasts.

## Sumska Oblast



Map 5 – Key findings from assessed settlements in Sumska oblast

Sumska, positioned along the northeastern border with Russia, remains one of the most vulnerable oblasts due to frequent shelling and ongoing security threats. Settlements like Velyka Pysarivka face compounded challenges, including damaged infrastructure and lack of local pharmacies. Residents face significant travel barriers, often relying on neighboring towns for essential medicines. Additionally, the oblast shows low utilization and awareness of the "Affordable Medicines" program, limiting its potential impact.

## Stakeholder-Specific Recommendations

### For Humanitarian Organizations:

- Adapt the deployment of outreach medical Units to hard-to-reach settlements, particularly in Zaporizka and Sumska oblasts.
- Collaborate with local healthcare providers to ensure the distribution of essential medicines is aligned with local needs.
- Advocate for sustained donor funding to maintain medicine supply chains in conflict-affected areas.

### For Local Stakeholders and Community Leaders:

- Facilitate community-based initiatives to support vulnerable populations, including elderly and chronically ill individuals.
- Partner with health authorities to identify and address gaps in medicine availability at the local level.
- Develop awareness campaigns to improve the public's knowledge of available programs and services.

These recommendations aim to provide a roadmap for addressing immediate needs while building sustainable systems for medicine availability and access across conflict-affected oblasts.

## Endnotes

1. WHO, **Frontline Oblast Needs Assessment: Factsheet based on the data collected in frontline areas of Dnipro, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolayiv, Odesa, and Zaporizhzhya oblasts**, February 2024
2. REACH, **Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM)**, March 2024
3. STATISTICS UKRAINE, **Number of Present Population of Ukraine**, January 2022
4. [Analytical dashboards of the National Health Service of Ukraine](#)