

Ukraine: Evacuations from Eastern Oblasts

April 2022

Context and Methodology

Since the escalation of conflict in February 2022, over 7.14 million people have been displaced internally throughout Ukraine.¹ Since the beginning of April, shifts in military trends have led to a second wave of population movement out of Eastern Oblasts, including Donetsk and Luhanska, as well as Kharkiv and Mariupol, largely toward the direction of Dnipro.² On 7th April 2022, the Mayor of Dnipro urged women, children and elderly new arrivals to move onwards from the city of Dnipro, in the light of the threat of conflict.³ As a result, key Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) arrival hubs and transit hubs in Central and Eastern Oblasts are seeing an increase in new arrivals, often in areas which were already overwhelmed by the arrival of previous waves of IDPs since the beginning of the conflict. In order to support the provision of humanitarian assistance to populations recently evacuated from the East of Ukraine and to better understand the situation in their areas of origin, REACH conducted a Rapid Assessment through 18 Key Informants Interviews with aid agencies, local authorities and collective site managers in Vinnytsia, Kropyvnytskyi, Cherkasy and Dnipro between April 09 and April 14. Interviews covered population movement patterns, demographic profile of the displaced, as well as local preparedness to new IDP arrivals and critical unmet needs. This brief presents a summary of findings from the assessment mission. Due to the purposive nature of the sampling methodology, findings should be considered indicative only.

Summary of Findings

- In early April, concerns began to mount regarding a potential large scale offensive in the Donbass region. Authorities in Eastern Oblasts have called for a mass evacuation of women, children and elderly people via Dnipro.² In addition to arrivals from the East, KIs report that Dnipro is also receiving evacuees from Kharkiv area to the North, and Mariupol area to the South.
- Subsequently, there has been a marked increase in arrivals at train stations and at collective sites in Dnipro, Vinnytsia, Kropyvnytskyi, Pavlohrad and Poltava. While it is difficult to quantify overall arrivals, numbers of IDP registered for longer stays has rapidly increased in these areas (**Figure 1**), in addition to large numbers of people who do not register due to being in transit, according to Key Informants (KIs).
- As Dnipro authorities are strongly encouraging incoming IDPs to move onwards from Dnipro following their arrival, IDPs have been moving westwards toward other Central Oblasts, Kyiv area, and toward the West according to KIs. There is a consensus among KIs that most IDPs arriving in this current wave of displacement are much more likely to settle for the long term in areas closer to their area of origin and increasingly in smaller rural settlements, suggesting that assistance is also required outside urban centers.
- KIs report that new arrivals are disproportionately women and children, as well as elderly people and persons with disabilities, often from poorer socioeconomic background. Many among new arrivals are reportedly those who were reluctant to leave during previous phases of the crisis due to lack of financial means to resettle elsewhere, or mobility impediments, as well as isolated persons.
- As of April 15th, KIs in Dnipro were reporting a reduction in numbers of arrivals from the peak observed during the previous week, which is attributed to the attack on the Kramatorsk train station on April 8th, the subsequent drastic reduction in train evacuation routes, and to above cited reluctance to move. Further peaks of arrivals are nevertheless expected as conflict unfolds.
- While there is a strong response and coordination from Oblast and municipal authorities with support from volunteer networks and aid actors, there are critical unmet needs in areas of arrival or transit, including for medicines, equipment, food and non-food items, in particular in temporary displacement sites. While distributions of food and NFIs have been taking place in some collective sites, local authorities and collective site managers report continued shortages, in particular for hygiene items, equipment and baby food.
- The current response is relying heavily on private initiatives and the public workforce and KIs expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of the response without structural support to local responders, including through provision of predictable item delivery, scale up of pre-positioning of key items in anticipation of future peaks in arrivals, and gap filling support to existing service delivery.

➔ Profile of evacuated populations and intentions

Routes leaving conflict affected areas

- Cities like Zaporizhzhia, Pavlohrad, Dnipro, Cherkasy, Kropyvnytskyi and Poltava serve **both as main destinations and transit sites for people displaced from Eastern and South-Eastern Ukraine**. The main modes of transport used by persons fleeing hostilities are trains, busses and private cars.
- Humanitarian trains that are free of charge, as well as commercial trains, used to depart daily from Kharkiv in the North-East, and Novozolotarivka, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Pokrovsk as well as several other hubs from the Donbass region. In the South people who make it to Zaporizhzhia also travel onward by road or train to Dnipro (**map 1**).
- On 8 April, Kramatorsk train station was targeted by a missile strike that left many civilians killed and wounded.⁴ Since then, the number of trains routes from the East to Dnipro has drastically decreased.
- Busses and private cars also account for many arrivals in Dnipro, Poltava and Zaporizhzhia. While key informants explained it is nearly impossible to register exact numbers, with many persons passing through in transit, **they estimate the number of people arriving by road to be higher or at least equal to the number arriving by train**.
- For those traveling by road, KIs reported the main route used by persons from Kharkiv as going through Poltava, and from Poltava either to Kremenchuk and further West, or South to Dnipro. Persons leaving the Donbas area travel via the 'green corridors' which pass through Pavlohrad, which by itself is increasingly becoming a point of destination rather than transit, before Dnipro and further West. Zaporizhzhia remains largely a site of transit for persons managing to leave the south.

Onward migration routes

- According to KIs, Dnipro, and to a lesser extent Poltava – Kremenchuk for persons traveling by road, are the main point of departure for people traveling further West.

1. IOM. [Internal Population Report. General Population Survey Round 2](#). 05 April 2022.

2. France 24. [Ukraine governor urges evacuations in region targeted by Russia](#). 04 April 2022.

3. Reuters. [City of Dnipro urges women and children to leave as fighting intensifies in East Ukraine](#). 07 April 2022.

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Map 1: Evacuation routes and displacement movement flows based on Key Informant Interviews



- In Dnipro, three humanitarian (free) trains heading to Western cities like Lviv, Ternopil, Chernivtsy, and Ivano-Frankivska depart daily. **The humanitarian train going directly to Poland from Dnipro is no longer free of charge, increasing the threshold for people to get on board.** Most trains also stop at cities in central oblasts (Piatykhvatky, Oleksandria, Uman and Vinnytsia.)
- While they were not able to provide exact numbers of persons disembarking in the station, **municipal authorities in Vinnytsia and Dnipro reported a sharp increase in the number of IDPs registering for assistance in the past 10 days.** This is a good indicator for people intending to stay, they explained, as IDPs tend to hold off registering while in transit and do so only once they reach their intended destination.
- Commercial busses and private vehicles travel mainly from Dnipro to more central and western oblasts. It is important to note that once people reach safety in Poltava or Dnipro, their next move is often determined by pull factors such as an existing social support network. For this reason, **many also decide to travel onward by bus or car to rural hromadas where municipal absorption capacity may be limited.** As for the mode of transport, trains are available and relatively cheap or free of charge, but people may have to wait for a few days to get a spot. Busses generally allow travel on the same day, but tickets are much more expensive at around 2500 UHA from Dnipro to the Lviv.

Anticipation of migration flows in the near-term

- **Local authorities and other key informants in Vinnytsia, Kropyvnytskyi and Dnipro anticipate new peaks in arrivals the coming weeks.** In Dnipro, they explained this trend is volatile and likely to increase and decrease depending on the opening of humanitarian corridors and evolving military operations.
- **In Vinnytsia and Kropyvnytskyi, key informants noted a shifting trend from being points of transit to final destination.** This, they say, is both evidenced by the increasing number of IDP registrations, as well as the profile of persons now arriving. Likewise, key informants observed Dnipro, Pavlohrad and Poltava as transitioning from being only transit points to becoming final destinations and reported to expect this trend to continue. This, despite concerns that places like Pavlohrad and Poltava may be affected by conflict themselves if hostilities continue to escalate.

4. BBC. [Kramatorsk Attack: what we know so far](#). 08 April 2022.

5. Sloviansk City Council. [Evacuation trains from Sloviansk temporarily canceled](#). 14 April 2022.

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Figure 1 : IDP registration figures as reported by Oblast authorities - 04 April to 14 April⁶

Oblast	April 4th	April 14th	% increase	Comments
Poltavska	60000	113000	188%	NA
Dnipropetrovska	Not reported	35000	NA*	*Figures reported for Dnipro city only
Kirovohradska	23000	46000	200%	NA
Cherkaska	54000	70000	129%	NA
Vinnytsia	70000	100000	143%	NA

Profile of evacuating populations

- KIs in Vinnytsia and Dnipro observed that IDPs arriving during this 'second wave' of displacement are increasingly vulnerable. They explained that many people now fleeing conflict-affected areas are those who face additional challenges in movement such as the elderly, and those with disabilities. Authorities in Vinnytsia voiced worries regarding a request to host large numbers of psychiatric patients needing to be relocated from a treatment facility in the East, citing the lack of sufficient space in adapted facilities at the point of arrival. Previously, such patients were reportedly mostly relocated to oblasts further west, but as institutions and hospitals there became overloaded, central oblasts increasingly carry the load.
- Additionally, more people from poorer socio-economic background are arriving in Dnipro. According to KIs, many arrivals now are those who lacked private means of transport to move during the first stages of the crisis, and would face challenges in finding work in more distant parts of the country. For these reasons, they have tended to stay in their area of origin until the threat of conflict became imminent.
- This change in demographic profile also links directly with migration flows and choice of destination. Persons from poorer backgrounds reportedly prefer to stay closer to their area of origin, as the cost of living in places further West like Lviv can be prohibitively expensive.
- It should further be noted that movement through humanitarian corridors is both arduous and dangerous. For people requiring additional care the journey becomes particularly strenuous, as treatment and assistance along the way is often not available. Travel itself, therefore, carries significant health and safety risks. KIs explained that as a result they are unlikely to travel much further than is needed to reach a point of safety – unless a support network or medical care is available elsewhere.
- KIs further reported that many who are leaving the Donbas are those who intended to stay for as long as possible in their area of origin, and who now intend to go back as soon as relative safety returns. For this reason, they tend to travel less far and instead decide to settle in locations that allow for a quick return once the security situation improves.
- Finally, it is important to note that many persons continue to be reluctant or unable to leave their area of origin in the Donbas and surrounding areas. They will likely face significant challenges in traveling later on, considering ongoing military advances, increasing danger along evacuation routes, as well as the halt most free evacuation train routes in the past few days. Should civilians wait until further military offensives and advances toward their cities and villages, the logistical capacity to facilitate evacuations in such event will likely be overwhelmed.

Focus on persons with disability and elderly persons

The ongoing evacuations from Eastern Oblasts reportedly comprise a disproportionate number of elderly persons as well as persons with disability. According to NGOs on the ground providing specific support to this population group, there is a critical need for emergency assistance to this population group. The most critical gap is adapted hygiene equipment, as well as mobility equipment, in particular in transit and reception sites in areas experiencing high IDP influx, as well as in areas currently affected by hostilities that humanitarian actors have been able to reach sporadically, including for populations stranded in underground shelters. KIs also report that elderly persons and persons with disabilities, as well as persons suffering from mental health or behavioural disorders are over represented among populations that have remained behind conflict lines, partly due to logistical and financial barriers to evacuation. In particular, the evacuation of larger groups of people with disabilities who stay in adapted care facilities in the East is proving difficult due to logistical challenges and difficulties to find space in appropriate facilities in arrival locations.

Local response & preparedness in areas of arrival and transit

In Central and Eastern Oblasts the humanitarian response to the displacement crisis has been largely driven by Oblast, Raion and municipal services with the support of volunteer networks as well as limited - albeit growing - support from humanitarian agencies. Local authorities direct new incoming humanitarian actors toward hromadas or collective sites presenting the most pressing needs based on their own information. Actors have been able to provide support to displacement sites directly, or to donate to local authorities.

Local preparedness and immediate response gaps

- Local officials are bracing for the impact of the large scale evacuations from the Donbas, coupled with continued arrivals from the Kharkiv area as well as Mariupol / Zaporizhia. Collective sites hosting IDPs have been established in a large number of dormitories, schools, sports centers, hospitals, malls, private houses, etc. KIs reported knowledge of at least 120 sites in Dnipro and 65 in

6. Figures reported by Oblast authorities through various Telegram channels. REACH monitors the telegram channels to track the progress of overall registration figures. The Dnipro figure was reported during a KII with members of the City council.

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Vinnytsia alone.

- **These sites are often managed directly by municipal employees (city council employees, teachers, etc.), and are often largely supported through private initiatives.** However, the response is not yet at scale and supply is not predictable for some needed items, preventing preparedness to future waves of displacement, in a context where officials expect more peaks in arrivals based on future military offensives. Local officials and collective sites managers cite a need for more hygiene items such as diapers (including for elderly people) and menstrual products, bed linen, extra beds, blankets, non-perishable food items, including baby food, disposable tableware and water.
- **In Vinnytsia and Dnipro, local officials highlighted that rural hromadas located along the road of evacuation from Donetsk, Sloviansk, and Kharkiv are especially in need of additional assistance as a result of new IDP arrivals and transits,** whereas large centers such as Vinnytsia have comparatively more absorption capacity and resources relative to the number of IDPs. **Local actors in various urban centers agree that more attention and assistance should be driven toward rural settlements.**
- **While the number of IDPs officially registered in Vinnytsia and Dnipro urban centers remains relatively limited compared to other cities in the West, officials report that population influx is having an impact on access to services,** including longer wait times for health consultations and difficulties for private sector companies in meeting a rising demand for free drinking water. Moreover, Vinnytsia officials reported facing challenges in terms of adapting its waste removal system to a larger population. The city also reports that funding for critical programmes is being re-directed to the humanitarian response. **Moreover, the heavy involvement of teachers in collective site management is leading to reduced availability for teaching, even remotely.** Finally, while IDP children are able to enroll in remote schooling in their area of arrival, many lack the IT equipment to follow classes.

Longer term response gaps

- With IDPs being strongly encouraged to move onwards from Dnipro to other locations in Central or Western Oblasts, cities in these locations are now expecting their towns to increasingly become longer term displacement locations, especially considering the trend for IDPs from the second wave of displacement to appear to be more likely to settle closer to their area of origin, as well as the trend **whereby IDPs or even refugees who had previously settled in Western Oblasts or European countries are returning to more central areas** such as Vinnytsia due to difficulties in finding affordable housing in the West.
- With a trend toward longer term settlement of IDPs in Central and Eastern Oblasts, response actors may continue to prioritize response to immediate needs among IDP arrivals, however **local planners are also pointing toward a need to supplement this approach with a focus on longer-term assistance.** For example, KIs emphasize that collective sites are in many cases not equipped for people to stay long due to lack of proper kitchens, shower installations and laundry equipment. Many reception centers are expected to turn into collective centers for longer term stays given many IDPs lack resources to pay for rent or, in smaller settlements along evacuation routes, settlements lack available constructions for rent.
- Local authorities are showing exceptional adaptation and creativity to respond to rising needs. In the initial weeks of the crisis, **the response strategy has been predominantly focused on response to immediate urgent needs, and collective sites are relying heavily on the public workforce to manage sites,** including teachers, daycare workers, as well as volunteers. **This model may become increasingly unsustainable as volunteers and public workers may need to return to usual employment in order to ensure the broader continuity of public service delivery.** While KIs expect that the local effort can continue to follow the same rhythm for the coming weeks, the beginning of the upcoming school year in September is frequently cited as a key challenge ahead.
- Finally, KIs add that there is **a need for further scale up of local and international assistance efforts, as well as a need to transition to a longer term approach to the response,** through structural interventions aimed at improving pre-positioning of emergency stocks to prepare for future waves of arrivals, instituting more predictable delivery schedules for key items, and adapt humanitarian support to the local response in order to fill gaps in local service delivery system, as opposed to replacing it.