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# DRC Quarterly Protection Monitoring Report Ukraine

October – December 2023



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## Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of DRC protection monitoring conducted in Ukraine in Lviv Oblast in the West, Chernihiv and Sumy Oblasts in the North, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts in the East, Mykolaiv and Kherson Oblasts in the South between October and December 2023.

This report seeks to identify trends in protection risks and rights violations, challenges facing conflict affected populations, and barriers in access to services (particularly for the most vulnerable) across surveyed oblasts during the reporting period. Findings inform ongoing and planned humanitarian response, enable the identification of vulnerable people for individual support, and support evidence-based advocacy on behalf of persons of concern. Findings from protection monitoring are visualized in an interactive dashboard which enables DRC and all relevant stakeholders to easily access this data.

To view the Protection Monitoring dashboard summarizing the main findings for the reporting period, click [here](#)

## Context update

The war in Ukraine continues to severely impact people's lives and damage civilian infrastructure, triggering evacuations from frontline areas and driving humanitarian needs. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) stated that at least 10,000 civilians, including more than 560 children, have been killed and over 18,500 have been injured since the Russian Federation military offensive launched on 24 February 2022<sup>1</sup>. The majority of civilian casualties and damage resulted from shelling and multiple missile strikes near the frontline between August and November 2023<sup>2</sup>. On 5 October, a missile attack targeting a funeral reception in Hroza, Kharkiv Oblast, killed 59 civilians. The attack was the deadliest in 2023 in terms of civilian casualties<sup>3</sup> and the highest casualties for a single incident in Kharkiv Oblast since the escalation in conflict. Shelling persisted along the frontline in the east and south of the country, and along the border in northern oblasts, with missile and drone strikes also hitting Kyiv during the monitoring period. On the night between 28 and 29 December, Kyiv suffered from the largest air attack on Ukraine since the beginning of the escalation of the conflict, killing 31 people and injuring more than 150 others<sup>4</sup>.

Shelter needs and winterization concerns such as access to resources for fuel and utilities escalated during the reporting period with the onset of winter, as many households lacked the resources to cover these needs over the winter. Damage to residential properties continued to be reported along the frontline during the monitoring period.

<sup>1</sup> "Civilian Deaths in Ukraine War Top 10,000, UN Says", 21 November 2023, United Nations Ukraine, available [here](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ukraine Situation Report, 23 November 2023, OCHA, available [here](#)

<sup>3</sup> Ukraine Situation Report, 23 November 2023, OCHA, available [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> "Russia's biggest air attack of war kills 31 in Ukraine, officials say", 30 December 2023, Reuters, available [here](#)

Hostilities continued to affect the delivery of basic services, with 83 educational facilities and 20 health-care establishments damaged or destroyed between August and November 2023<sup>5</sup>. According to IOM DTM data, there were a total of 3,522,045 registered IDP in Ukraine as of 31 December 2023<sup>6</sup>.

## Methodology

Protection monitoring data has been gathered through a mixed methodology approach including in-person household surveys, Key Informant (KI) interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), direct observation, and Rapid Protection Assessments (RPAs). The report also reflects the findings of protection monitoring carried out at the level of the Protection Cluster community, which alongside other protection partners, DRC supports using structured key informant interviews. The diversity of data collection methods allows for gaining richer information and more in-depth insights into individuals' and groups' perceptions of needs and capacities. This collection of data and information is complemented by secondary data review and information shared during coordination meetings at local, regional and national levels. DRC protection monitoring activities target a variety of groups including Internally Displaced People (IDP), returnees and non-displaced people directly exposed to and affected by the current armed conflict in both rural and urban areas.

**Figure 1: Household respondents per displacement group**

Non-displaced member	734	65.5%
IDP	321	28.7%
Returnee	61	5.4%
Unable/unwilling to answer	3	0.3%
Refugee	1	0.1%

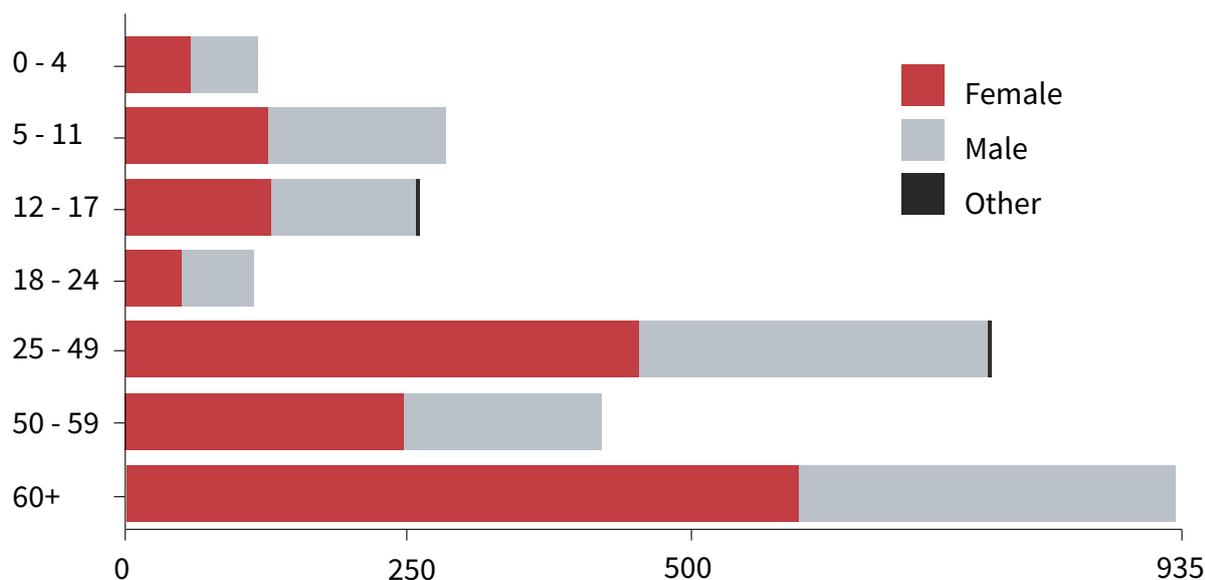
Between the 1<sup>st</sup> of October and 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023, DRC protection teams surveyed 1,125 households corresponding to 2,904 individuals. Most of the surveyed households were affected non-displaced (66% - 734 respondents). 29% (321 respondents) were IDP, 5% (61 respondents) were returnees, and 0.1% were refugees (1 respondent). A total of 98% of the surveyed individuals are Ukrainian citizens, 57% are females, while the average age of surveyed individuals is 44 years old.

<sup>5</sup> Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 August 2023 – 30 November 2023, OHCHR, available [here](#)

<sup>6</sup> Registered IDP Area Baseline Assessment – Ukraine Round 31 – December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

In addition, 155 interviews (including 79 National Protection Cluster KIs) with representatives of local authorities, national organisations and CSOs, members of local/community-based organisations, community group representatives and opinion leaders, social workers and activists were conducted, as well as 62 FGDs reaching 750 participants.

Figure 2: Surveyed households per age and gender groups



## Main protection risks and needs

### Liberty and freedom of movement

#### Forced displacement

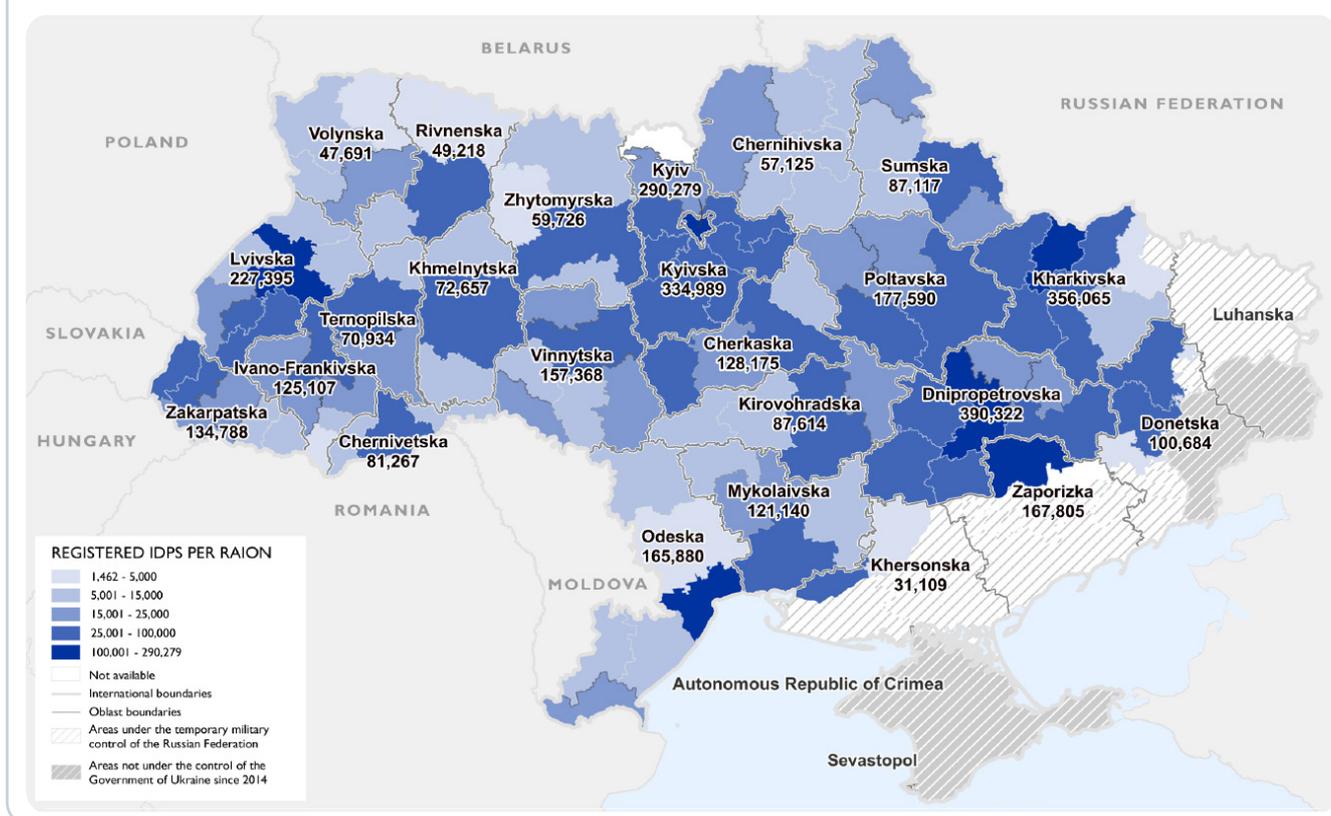
According to IOM DTM data, there were a total of 3,522,045 registered IDP in Ukraine as of 31 December 2023<sup>7</sup>, with Dnipropetrovsk hosting the highest number of registered IDP at 390,322, followed by Kharkiv Oblast, with 356,065. Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts host proportionally higher shares of registered female IDP (59% and 56% respectively) as well as higher shares of registered IDP of 18-59 years old (57% and 58% respectively), while Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts host higher shares of IDP aged 60 and above, accounting for 29% each. Following the trends reported by IOM DTM in previous months, Kharkiv Oblast continued to see the greatest increase in registered IDP numbers as IDP move from frontline areas towards less conflict-affected areas such as Kharkiv city. Since October 2023, there has been a movement of IDP from Avdiivka to other parts of Donetsk Oblast as the intensity of fighting increased.

<sup>7</sup> Registered IDP Area Baseline Assessment – Ukraine Round 31 – December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

Evacuation trains from Zaporizhzhia city and Pokrovske (Donetsk Oblast), as well as an evacuation bus from Kherson city, are still operating. A decline in the number of evacuation requests from individuals and households affected by shelling in the southern regions of Zaporizhzhia Oblast was reported<sup>8</sup>. Despite this decrease, the evacuation train continues its operations to transport those still in need. Simultaneously, there are approximately 1000 vacant spaces available for the settlement of newly arrived IDPs in Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

DRC’s household-level protection monitoring data indicates that the main factors influencing displacement from the area of origin are driven by the security situation (namely shelling at 89%, 284 respondents), destruction or damage of property due to the conflict (33%, 105 respondents), occupation of property (18%, 59 respondents), and damage to infrastructure (12%, 37 respondents). In southern oblasts of Mykolaiv and Kherson, individuals frequently displaced to nearby communities during intense shelling of missile attacks, often returning when the situation stabilised, particularly families with children. Insights from focus group discussions, primarily conducted in frontline communities, revealed residents' hesitancy to permanently leave due to dissatisfaction with available resettlement options.

Figure 3: Registered IDP presence per raion as of 31 December 2023<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Sub-National Protection Cluster Meeting, 19 December 2023, Zaporizhzhia

<sup>9</sup> Registered IDP Area Baseline Assessment – Ukraine Round 31 – December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

Reports indicate a phenomenon where individuals are registering as IDPs in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, presumably to access social benefits, and subsequently returning to their original places of residence once the registration process is completed<sup>10</sup>. This pattern is not isolated and has been observed comparably in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, as reported by key informants.

In many villages and settlements of Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts, most if not all families with children have left since the escalation, leaving mainly the elderly and people with disabilities behind. This could explain why, as aforementioned, Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts exhibit the highest proportion of registered IDPs aged 60 and above.

During FGDs with those who have chosen not to evacuate, people did not express any desire to leave unless the security situation drastically changes. The prevailing sentiment is rooted in the reluctance of respondents to abandon their land/productive assets, coupled with financial constraints that hinder the ability to relocate. Additionally, there is a prevailing fear among the residents that leaving their homes might result in the looting of possessions and houses.

**“Those who want to leave,  
have already left.”**

FGD Participant, Donetsk Oblast

As of end of September 2023, IOM estimates that 4,573,000 people have returned to their place of habitual residence in Ukraine following a period of displacement, 22% of whom returned from abroad<sup>11</sup>. According to the report, returns are more likely to occur in areas with improved living conditions, including increased job opportunities.

Of the IDP respondents interviewed through DRC’s household-level protection monitoring across all surveyed oblasts, 58% (160 respondents) indicated their intention to return to their habitual place of residence. Several key factors were noted as contributing to intentions to return to the place of habitual residence, including an improved security situation (78%, 122 respondents), the cessation of hostilities (59%, 92 respondents), repaired housing (21%, 33 respondents) and repaired/restored infrastructure (19%, 29 respondents).

In Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts, insights gathered from FGDs and KIIs underscore a notable trend of people, including families, opting to return to their homes. The primary driver for this return is the financial strain experienced in the areas of displacement, serving as a compelling "push factor." IDP face challenges securing employment in their displacement areas, and the social benefits available are often insufficient to cover rent and basic needs. Similarly, in Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts, key informants have reported that IDPs opt for return to their habitual places of residence due to the limited availability of suitable shelter options, high rental costs, and a lack of employment opportunities in displacement areas. In southern oblasts, findings from focus group discussions and key informant interviews suggest that returns are often motivated by dissatisfaction with living conditions, limited economic opportunities, and inadequate support from the government or humanitarian organisations elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> Sub-National Protection Cluster Meeting, 19 December 2023, Zaporizhzhia

<sup>11</sup> Conditions of Return Assessment, Round 5 Factsheet, November 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

Those who decided to return also cite additional motivations acting as "pull factors." These include a desire to safeguard their land and possessions from potential looting, as well as a longing for the familiar sense of "home." In one FGD with returnees in Donetsk Oblast, a mother shared that her children faced bullying in Western Ukraine because they were accustomed to speaking Russian. The family decided to return to Donetsk where they felt more accepted. The emotional attachment and the absence of a true feeling of belonging in the displacement areas contribute to the decision to return, highlighting the complex interplay of push and pull factors in the dynamics of displacement and return.

**Figure 4. Intentions per displacement status**

**IDPs**

Return to the place of habitual residence	160	58.2%
Integrate into the local community	105	38.2%
Relocate to another area in Ukraine	6	2.2%
Relocate to a country outside of Ukraine	4	1.5%

**Non-displaced**

Stay in place of habitual residence	726	99.0%
Relocate to another area in Ukraine	6	0.8%
Relocate to a country outside of Ukraine	1	0.1%

**Refugees and returnees**

Stay in place of habitual residence	58	95.1%
Relocate to another area in Ukraine	2	3.3%
Relocate to a country outside of Ukraine	1	1.6%

## Freedom of movement

The sole official movement restriction that remains in effect is the ongoing government-imposed curfew. However, various factors significantly hinder people's ability to move freely, including issues of transportation accessibility and affordability, disability-inclusive infrastructure, as well as concerns related to conscription.

Across surveyed oblasts, 22% of household respondents (66 respondents) reported the lack of regular and accessible public transportation options and/or the lack of financial resources to pay for transportation services as a major barrier to their freedom of movement, particularly for residents of more remote villages and settlements who need to access larger cities. FGD participants in Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts indicated that in many cases, buses operate infrequently, often only once a week. Furthermore, these transportation options are not designed to accommodate people with disabilities, making them inaccessible to a portion of the population. The associated costs also render these services unaffordable for individuals who rely solely on pension and/or disability payments.

In Volyn Oblast, transportation challenges are significantly impacting access to essential services, as reported by respondents from various hromadas. Difficulties in accessing regular or any public transportation have been consistently raised as a concern. An elderly woman in Vatnytsi village shared that her granddaughter can no longer attend school because the school bus no longer passes by the village. Similar problems were reported by participants living in villages of Lytovezh hromada, where irregular transportation becomes even more challenging, especially during adverse weather conditions. These difficulties in transportation not only limit access to education but also create barriers to reaching other essential services. Of the household respondents who reported barriers to accessing healthcare (which accounted for 28% of the total number of households surveyed), 35% identified a lack of transportation means as a hindrance, while 26% mentioned the associated costs of transportation to healthcare facilities.

Additionally, FGD participants in Kharkiv and Mykolaiv expressed concerns about the active mobilisation for conscription, with similar reports of increase in mobilisation processes were reported by KIs in Chernihiv and Sumy Oblasts. As a result of these concerns, some men have limited their movements. As of December 25, 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers has submitted a draft law on mobilisation to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine<sup>12</sup>.

The proposed changes within the draft law are primarily directed at mobilizing a larger number of men, including through a reduction in the conscription age and the elimination of the right to deferment for individuals with group III disabilities. Furthermore, the draft law introduces new consequences for breaching military registration rules, including a prohibition on international travel.

**“Wherever you go to get a job, you are asked to register.”**

FGD participant, Collective Centre, Lviv Oblast

Verbal instructions appear to be already in place, with the State Border Guard Service reportedly disallowing male parents with multiple children from travelling abroad according to information from open sources<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> This draft law can be found [here](#). However it was withdrawn on 11 January 2024, and a new draft law was introduced on 30 January 2024 with the above provisions included (accessible [here](#))

<sup>13</sup> “Border Guards Confirmed Increased Control Over the Departure of Men“, December 2023, Zaxid.net, available [here](#)

The situation regarding freedom of movement in areas near the contact line in Zaporizhzhia oblast has recently evolved. Individuals who are not officially residing in those areas and humanitarian stakeholders who need to travel to Orikhivska or Stepanovska hromadas are now required to apply for permission two days in advance. Information shared during the sub-national Protection Cluster Meeting in Zaporizhzhia in December suggests that there is an option to formalise permission at checkpoints. This indicates an increased level of regulation and control over movement in conflict-affected areas as a response to the challenging security situation, impacting the ability of individuals to move freely within the area.

## Life, safety and security

### Sense of safety

Overall, 36% of respondents (405) across surveyed oblasts reported a poor sense of safety (feeling unsafe or very unsafe) mainly due to shelling or threats thereof (94%, 378 respondents). This represents a substantial surge compared to the previous monitoring period, reflecting an 11% increase. Respondents residing in frontline oblasts of Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Kherson have consistently reported a sense of insecurity, with 60%, 56% and 54% of respondents respectively. Residents in rural areas experience a significantly higher prevalence of a diminished sense of safety, with 42% of respondents from rural areas expressing feelings of insecurity, compared to 25% among urban respondents. The cyber-attack that targeted one of Ukraine's largest mobile operators in December 2023 temporarily impacted the protection environment within Ukraine as the access of millions of people to vital public services that relied on mobile operator 'Kyivstar' as both wireless and wired Internet service provider, including the banking system, postal services, street lighting as well as air raid notification systems that experienced interruption or unstable operations throughout the country.

FGDs conducted during the reporting period in Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts, participants expressed an overall sense of safety. Non-displaced participants noted feeling more secure compared to the initial stages of the conflict, and IDP expressed feeling safer in their current location compared to their areas of origin, which were closer to the front-line. Participants mentioned becoming accustomed to the sounds of explosions. Some described having "mut- ed" the sound, revealing a coping mechanism to deal with the ongoing and stressful insecurity.

Despite this apparent adaptation, a nuanced reality emerges — people express feeling "safe" within the context of their circumstances, yet simultaneously grapple with heightened stress and fear regarding the potential of being harmed in shelling. Notably, 45% of respondents across surveyed oblasts identified the fear of injury or death from shelling as a significant source of stress. This highlights the mix of emotions people in affected communities face, trying to feel safe while dealing with constant worries about the security challenges.

Challenges related to the functioning of the air alert system were reported, especially in frontline communities in eastern and southern oblasts. In Mykolaiv Oblast, FGD participants in one hromada reported that it either remains non-functional or operates at a volume too low to warn residents adequately. Conversely, residents in another hromada expressed dissatisfaction with its excessively loud and prolonged alerts, contributing to heightened stress levels.

Engagements with residents from various frontline hromadas underscore the insufficient functionality of the Air Alert system in frontline communities. Participants mentioned that they do not trust the air sirens due to the short flight time of missiles from the contact line, which means air raid sirens are often activated simultaneously or even after a strike. In addition, particularly in rural areas, cellular connections may be intermittent, and access to Wi-Fi or wired connections is a challenge in many rural/frontline areas. As a result, people may experience delays or, in some cases, may not receive critical messages from air raid alert applications. The massive cyberattack on IT and communication infrastructure in December 2023 resulted in the malfunctioning of air alert systems, mobile and internet communication, leaving a high number of affected communities more vulnerable to shelling attacks. There is a widespread agreement that the resources invested in the Air Alert System would have been more beneficial if directed towards establishing proper shelters, given the evident trend of inadequacy or absence of shelters.

A discernible pattern of challenges arises from the lack of adequately functioning shelters in conflict-affected and rural communities of Mykolaiv, Kherson, Kharkiv, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

**Figure 5: Factors influencing the sense of safety**

Bombardment/shelling or threat of shelling	378	94.0%
Landmines or UXOs contamination	71	17.7%
Presence of armed or security actors	57	14.2%
Other	16	4.0%
Fighting between armed or security actors	7	1.7%
Intercommunity tensions	4	1.0%
Risks of eviction	1	0.2%
Criminality	1	0.2%

Shelters are often distant or closed during curfew hours, and the basements of high-rise buildings are ill-equipped for safety. Frequently, residents resort to unreliable home basements, lower floors or simply adhere to the "two wall" rule to minimise exposure to danger during shelling and missile attacks. Most shelters are also difficult for the elderly and people with disabilities to access.

**“We do not seek shelter anymore, because there is none available.”**

FGD participant, Zaporizhzhia Oblast

## Mine contamination

18% of household respondents reporting feeling unsafe indicated UXOs contamination as a major influencing factor. Explosive ordnance and their remnants are prevalent in areas close to the front line with documented cases of citizens sustaining injuries due to landmines, with the majority of casualties documented in Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Kherson oblasts and disproportionately affecting men and boys<sup>14</sup>. Reports from FGD participants also indicate the placement of anti-personnel mines along the entire coastline in the South. According to the Head of Zaporizhskiyi raion in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, 35,000 hectares of land have been contaminated with UXOs in southern areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast rendering them currently unsuitable for cultivation.

According to key informants in Kharkiv Oblast, farmers are attempting to demine their agricultural land using farm equipment due to delays in decontamination. Since farming and agriculture constitute a primary source of income for many, there is a growing sense of desperation to regain access to their land and resume activities. This has prompted some farmers to undertake demining efforts independently, despite the evident risks involved.

As many areas are contaminated with mines, people reduce their movements and fear walking or travelling on roads that are not frequently used. In that context, the presence of ERW stands as the second significant impediment to freedom of movement, as indicated by 24% of household respondents.

## Psychological distress

Reports of significant stress and deterioration of mental health and wellbeing continue to be prevalent in Ukraine. The United Nations Security Council stated that 69% of Ukrainians suffer from psychological distress<sup>15</sup>. In FGDs organised in eastern and southern oblasts, people expressed significant challenges to their mental health, mainly dealing with stress, grief, depression, uncertainty about the future and social isolation. FGDs' participants and household respondents voiced fears related to reoccupation, concerns about being harmed during shelling or missile attacks, worries about the future and their children, and concerns about their property being damaged or destroyed by armed violence. Coping mechanisms mentioned include seeking support through communication with family and friends, taking sedatives, or watching entertainment programmes. Some key informants also reported substance abuse, especially among men, to cope with psychological distress. Notably, many affected individuals do not actively seek psychological help, either due to limited awareness of available services, to a lack of confidence in their effectiveness, or to the stigma related to seeking mental health support from specialists.

Older individuals and those with disabilities are more prone to experiencing psychological distress, often stemming from an elevated sense of loneliness, a lack of social engagement, and a shortage of communal spaces for interaction and connection with others.

<sup>14</sup> Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 February – 31 July 2023, OHCHR, available [here](#)

<sup>15</sup> “Decrying Escalating Attacks on Ukraine’s Civilian Infrastructure, Security Council Speakers Renew Call for Russian Federation to Cease War of Aggression”, 21 November 2023, UNSC, available [here](#)

**“There is a stigma attached to seeking help from a psychologist, especially in rural villages. People worry more about what others might say than taking care of their own mental health.”**

FGD participant, Zaporizhzhia Oblast

In FGDs in Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts, many elderly respondents expressed feeling defenseless, sad, abandoned, and isolated with little, if any, family remaining in their area who can support and provide emotional relief. Local government social workers support the elderly and conduct home visits, however the system is overwhelmed and they are unable to respond to all the needs that have been created by the conflict. Conversely, in less isolated villages, elderly individuals participating in focus group discussions mentioned that younger and able-bodied community members provided support by assisting them and other single heads of households with grocery shopping and errands.

**Figure 6: Major stress factors**

Fear of being killed or injured by armed violence	463	45.4%
Worries about the future	443	43.5%
Worries about the children	321	31.5%
Fear of property being damaged or destroyed by armed violence	273	26.8%
Displacement related stress	174	17.1%
Lack of access to specialized medical services	45	4.4%
Other	33	3.2%
Lack of access to employment opportunities	23	2.3%
Lack of access to basic services	23	2.3%
Fear of conscription	17	1.7%
Missing family members	13	1.3%
Stigmatization/discrimination	11	1.1%

Findings from FGDs and KIIs conducted with isolated men in western oblasts indicate that fear of conscription, coupled with the inability to secure safe accommodation and employment, is a prominent factor contributing to the distress experienced by these men, exposing them to negative coping mechanisms such as substance abuse and gambling addiction. Under the influence of substances, affected individuals may exhibit behaviours that are frightening or harmful to those around them. Excessive alcohol consumption and drug dependence can contribute to aggression towards others and risky behaviours. FGD participants residing in collective centres expressed a constant sense of anxiety due to the awareness that the continuation of their accommodation is contingent upon presenting the required civil documentation.

## Civil status, access to remedies and justice

### Access to civil and HLP documentation

Across surveyed oblasts, 17% of household respondents reported facing access barriers to obtain documentation. While length and cost of administrative procedures were the main access barriers reported (37% of them), lack of information remains a significant obstacle (reported by 32% of respondents), and the need for legal services and individual counselling, especially related to civil documentation and government housing compensation, remains high especially among the elderly population. Physical access remains considerably challenging for residents of rural and remote areas in need of civil status and HLP documentation as well as access to remedies. Administrative offices are situated in larger towns and raion centres, posing difficulties for many to access them due to the limited availability of public and private transport options, and the associated transportation costs (with 15% of respondents reporting access barriers to obtain documentation).

**“Currently, people have to travel to Zaporizhzhia or Vilniansk cities for administrative services. Lack of public transport and financial constraints result in challenging access.”**

Key informant, Zaporizhzhia Oblast

FGD participants and KI in Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblasts raised that many people lack necessary documentation, either left behind in their areas of origin or damaged. Renewing or obtaining these documents proves particularly challenging given the difficulty in accessing administrative centers. Notary services required for obtaining passports cannot be provided in Donetsk Oblast; instead, individuals must seek such services in Kharkiv Oblast. However, administrative centres in Kharkiv, especially those close to Donetsk, such as Izium, are experiencing overwhelming demand. The lack of capacity of state administrative services in Donetsk and Kharkiv Oblasts was pointed out by participants and respondents. This results in prolonged waiting times for available services, and, in some cases, certain services are no longer accessible. This deficiency notably affects notary services and also hampers the ability to rectify inaccurate or outdated documents, particularly those related to housing.

## IDP registration and benefits

Across surveyed oblasts, 6% of IDP respondents reported being unregistered. This is significantly higher for male IDPs of conscription age (11%). In Zaporizhzhia Oblast, the ratio of unregistered IDP is significantly higher with 19% of overall IDP respondents reporting not being registered, and 21% for IDP adult males. This can be explained by concerns about legislative changes related to the provision of IDP benefits<sup>16</sup>, delays in receiving IDP allowances, or when the displacement occurs within the same hromada (preventing displaced individuals from being eligible to register as an IDP). As noted by a key informant in Shyroktivska hromada, Zaporizhskiy raion, Zaporizhska Oblast: *“Many of those displaced wish to remain close to their places of permanent residence despite the proximity to ongoing hostilities.”*

The significant stress resulting from the changes in the provision of IDP benefits is evident in different settlements of Lviv Oblast. IDPs have expressed deep concerns, indicating that if their IDP allowance was canceled, they would be compelled to return to their areas of origin, as they lack the means to sustain themselves in the western part of Ukraine and risk becoming homeless. Notably, certain elderly individuals who have modest savings in their bank accounts are experiencing a halt in their IDP payments if those savings are amounting to 100,000 UAH, even if they had saved the money for crucial purposes such as surgeries or other essential needs. Adding to this, individuals who have been abroad for more than 30 days are losing their IDP benefits upon their return. Throughout the monitoring period, there has been a significant number of requests for legal information and support concerning the cancellation of payments and the entitlement to ongoing assistance.

## Compensation for unlawful property destruction

Access to compensation mechanisms for damaged and destroyed property continues to pose challenges, and the lack of suitable housing remains a significant obstacle preventing families with children from returning. While persons of concern can apply for the housing recovery programme on the Diya online platform, the application process is complex, especially for applicants lacking ownership documents, technical certificates or facing inheritance issues. Across surveyed oblasts, 11% of household respondents reported lacking HLP documentation, including property ownership documents for housing and land, inheritance certificates and certificates from the Bureau of Technical Inventory. In addition, state registration committees, which are formed to assess applications, do not work in “red zones”, according to key informants in Donetsk Oblast. Moreover, if accepted, compensation is promised only after the situation stabilises in the area. Furthermore, the government's compensation mechanism exclusively covers housing in Government-Controlled Areas (GCA) that sustained damage after February 2022. These specific criteria impose limitations on the ability of IDP affected by this situation to settle and rebuild their lives elsewhere in the country.

<sup>16</sup> Resolution #709 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated July 11, 2023 “Some issues of support for internally displaced persons” and Resolution #789 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated July 31, 2023 “On Amendments to the Procedure for Providing Housing Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons”

On 27 October 2023, the Government of Ukraine adopted Resolution #1185 launching the pilot project that will aim at the examination of destroyed housing on the territories that are currently beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine, through the use of technology for remote sensing of the Earth<sup>17</sup>.

## Non-discrimination and equality

### Physical barriers

Physical barriers to access services, including accommodation and healthcare, continue to impose severe limitations on elderly people and people with disabilities. During Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts, participants consistently identified elderly individuals, especially those heading single households, as the most vulnerable in the community. Both oblasts have a significant elderly population, as many younger individuals and families with children have fled the areas, leaving behind older residents who often face difficulty moving due to physical limitations, or are unwilling to leave their homes. The elderly, being less mobile and sometimes unwilling to relocate, encounter substantial obstacles in accessing safe shelters during air alarms in their areas of displacement and origin. Consequently, they constitute a disproportionate number of civilian casualties in Ukraine.

According to an Amnesty International report on elderly in Ukraine, should the elderly decide to leave, they “often face insurmountable hurdles in their efforts to rebuild an autonomous and dignified life, struggling to access housing, support services and healthcare on an equal basis with others.”<sup>18</sup> Elderly IDPs encounter additional hurdles in finding suitable and appropriate shelter at collective centres. There are reports of elderly IDPs and IDPs with disabilities being turned away from collective centres as they are not accessible, and KIs admitted that most collective centres were not suitable for the elderly and PwDs. This was confirmed by observation rounds in collective centres and health facilities, which displayed numerous access barriers, such as a lack of ramps and narrow elevators, preventing residents, including those in wheelchairs, from leaving or accessing facilities. FGD participants in Chervenogorod city, Lviv Oblast, reported difficulties for persons with reduced mobility living on higher floors without elevators, hindering their ability to leave, and highlighted challenges in accessing showers due to steep climbs. Key informants from Novoiavorivski collective centre in Lviv Oblast expressed concerns about non-inclusive entrances, including narrow doors, high doorsteps, and difficulty accessing WASH facilities. These accessibility issues impeding freedom of movement emphasise the urgent need for inclusive infrastructure improvements. Resolution #930, adopted on September 1, 2023<sup>19</sup>, by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine establishes minimum standards for the functioning of collective sites. The resolution includes provisions for barrier-free infrastructure, highlighting a commitment to ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for individuals with disabilities.

<sup>17</sup> DRC Legal Alert: Issue 100, 1 October – 31 October 2023, available [here](#); Legislative Update on displacement-related legislation, October 2023, UNHCR

<sup>18</sup> “They live in the dark”, Older people’s isolation and inadequate access to housing amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Amnesty International, December 2023, available [here](#)

<sup>19</sup> Thematic Legislative Update on Collective Sites, September 2023, UNHCR

## Access to humanitarian assistance

Tensions persist between community groups regarding access to and the targeting criteria for humanitarian assistance, and this issue is reported in both eastern and western oblasts of Ukraine. The perceived unequal distribution of humanitarian aid is fueling tensions among community members, with disparities arising between those who receive assistance and those who do not. These findings are consistent with those of IOM's General Population Survey, which show that the most reported reason for social tensions was perceived unequal access to cash assistance, especially in rural areas<sup>20</sup>. The unclear criteria for receiving humanitarian aid, particularly concerning cash support, adds to the tension, as it varies from one non-governmental organisation (NGO) to another. This variation is perceived as unfair, creating a sense of dissatisfaction within the affected communities.

## Basic economic and social rights

### Right to housing

#### Access to temporary accommodation

Among IDP household-level respondents reporting concerns related to their current accommodation (40%, 127 respondents), the predominant worry remains the risk of eviction, as reported by 32% (39 respondents). This concern is consistent with findings from the previous monitoring period and is linked to the Resolution #930 on the functioning of the collective sites adopted on 1st of September 2023 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This resolution provides a definition and sets minimum standards for collective sites, outlining plans for the closure of those that do not comply with these standards after a six month period. In Lviv Oblast, FGD participants residing in collective sites in Chervonohrad and Noviavorivsk cities highlighted eviction as a major risk. Some residents of a publicly-owned collective site in Chervonohrad city mentioned that local authorities visited their collective site and insisted that IDPs should leave the dormitory without providing alternative accommodation. This situation was eventually resolved by involving law enforcement agencies.

In addition, the presentation of personal civil documentation is a prerequisite for accessing any services, including temporary accommodation, including collective centres, rehabilitation centres, and homeless shelters. IDPs seeking placement in a collective centre must apply to local government authorities and submit essential documents such as a passport, identification code, and IDP certificate. While some collective centres allow temporary accommodation for up to three days without complete documentation, individuals are directed to free legal aid providers during this period. These legal aid providers assist in document recovery and obtaining IDP certificates.

<sup>20</sup> Thematic Brief, Social Cohesion and Public Trust, December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

However, it was observed in many instances that individuals are denied temporary accommodation if the necessary documentation is not provided. This is particularly affecting single men of conscription age. For those who managed to access temporary accommodation without the required documents, there is a recurring sense of anxiety. They are aware that failure to submit their documents may result in losing their accommodation.

## Winter hardship

Shelter concerns in Ukraine have escalated significantly as coping mechanisms to manage winter conditions have been strained or exhausted. As a result, as temperatures have dropped, challenges related to heating, housing, winter-specific needs, and the capacity to endure the harsh winter conditions have increased. Damage to residential properties continued to be observed and reported during the monitoring period, especially in frontline communities. DRC’s household level protection monitoring highlights that among the 31% of respondents reporting concerns related to their current accommodation, the predominant issue is the accommodation’s condition due to damage, as reported by 46% of them (158 respondents).

**Figure 7: Concerns about current accommodation**

Accommodation’s condition	158	46.2%
Lack of functioning utilities	71	20.8%
Security and safety risks	64	18.7%
Risk of eviction	48	14.0%
Lack of support for damaged housing	39	11.4%
Overcrowded/Lack of privacy	14	4.1%
Lack of connectivity	14	4.1%
Not disability inclusive	11	3.2%
Lack or loss of ownership documentation	8	2.3%

According to a General Population Survey (GPS) conducted in November 2023 by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) <sup>21</sup>, 44% of respondents reporting that they were considering leaving their current location cited the arrival of winter as a significant motivator for their decision.

Significant gaps in access to heating were reported across Ukraine, especially in frontline oblasts, with a substantial shortfall in essential heating appliances and the anticipated shortages of solid fuel during the winter. The top three oblasts with the highest ratio of respondents that reported a lack of heating appliances include Kherson (36%), Kharkiv (29%) and Donetsk (27%) oblasts<sup>22</sup>. Solid fuels have been reported to be one of the most crucial winterisation products in the country with non-IDP more likely to report unmet solid fuel needs than other population groups<sup>23</sup>. This need is likely to grow more in the areas closer to the front line where they are found to be least available, regular shelling has affected other sources of heating and land contamination hinders affected communities from collecting firewood in the forests. Another pressing issue is the rising price of rental accommodation, with the cost of one-bedroom apartments witnessing significant growth since the escalation of the conflict. In addition, GPS data highlighted the need for winter essentials, including bedding kits or blankets, warm clothing, and heating appliances, with the IDP consistently reporting the highest levels of winter-related needs, including in Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblasts.

## Right to education

According to government sources, as of 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, a total of 3,798 educational institutions have been damaged, of which 365 have been completely destroyed since the beginning of the current conflict<sup>24</sup>. The most severely affected areas are frontline areas in the east of the country, such as Donetsk (930 schools damaged or destroyed), Kharkiv (630), Kherson (347), Mykolaiv (279), Zaporizhzhia (226) and Luhansk (205) oblasts. Government statistics reveal that only 30% of the 3 million school-aged children in Ukraine are currently participating in fulltime face-to-face learning. Additionally, approximately 30% have access to some face-to-face classes through a hybrid education model, while 40% are restricted to online education including due to a lack of bomb shelters in schools and the threat of air strikes<sup>25</sup>. Frontline areas encounter some of the most significant challenges in terms of access to education. In Kharkiv oblast for instance, only one primary class offers in-person classes in a metro station<sup>26</sup>. Ensuring shelters for every school presents a considerable challenge. Structural issues in basement premises and challenges related to heating, water supply, as well as arranging furniture and educational equipment contribute to the complexity of this challenge.

<sup>21</sup> Thematic Brief, “Winterization – Shelter, Heating and Needs”, December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

<sup>22</sup> Thematic Brief, “Winterization – Shelter, Heating and Needs”, December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

<sup>23</sup> Ukrainian Crisis Situational Analysis, 19 December 2023, Data Friendly Space and IMPACT, available [here](#)

<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian Crisis Situational Analysis, 19 December 2023, Data Friendly Space and IMPACT, available [here](#)

<sup>25</sup> Ukrainian Crisis Situational Analysis, 19 December 2023, Data Friendly Space and IMPACT, available [here](#)

<sup>26</sup> Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 August 2023 – 30 November 2023, OHCHR, available [here](#)

**“The shelling or attempted shelling definitely make a negative impact on children education. Due to the absence of bomb shelters, right now only online education is available. Even though, online classes are interrupted and resumed when the alarm goes off.”**

FGD participant (teacher), Zaporizky raion, Zaporizhzhia Oblast

Online learning presents considerable concerns and challenges, with a pressing need for devices to enable attendance in online classes. Power outages and internet limitations further hinder access to education. In some hromadas in both Donetsk and Kharkiv Oblasts, local authorities and CSOs/local NGOs have established unofficial "education centres." These centres serve as classrooms equipped with tablets, computers, and other materials and stationery necessary for accessing online school. Some local authorities also use Starlink to support internet access for education purposes.

The necessity of remote learning has contributed to a sense of loneliness, with 24% of parents identifying a lack of communication as one of the main problems their children are facing<sup>27</sup>. In FGDs conducted in eastern and southern oblasts, caregivers reported that children feel isolated and have limited in-person socialisation with other children. They also expressed hesitancy to allow their children out of the house due to mine contamination and the risk of shelling, further intensifying their sense of isolation. Additionally, there is need to pay attention to the inclusion of children with special education needs to regular educational forms. Caregivers are also impacted, as they have to supervise children during school hours. Women, in particular, face challenges in caregiving and providing for the household.

## Right to health

Health continues to be a major need for the vast majority of households surveyed, cited by a total of 50% (566) of respondents as a priority need. A higher percentage, namely 33% (371) of household-level respondents, indicated facing barriers to accessing healthcare, compared to the previous monitoring period. Barriers include a lack of specialized healthcare services (47%, 171 respondents), a lack of available health facilities (39%, 143 respondents), the distance and lack of transportation means to access existing facilities (38%, 138 respondents), the cost associated with transportation (31%, 112 respondents) as well as the cost of the services provided (25%, 91 respondents). In rural areas of eastern Ukraine, barriers to access healthcare were reported by a significantly higher proportion of household-level respondents, including 78% in Donetsk oblast, 63% in Kharkiv oblast, and 49% in Zaporizhzhia oblast. In some eastern remote villages and settlements without a healthcare facility, it was reported that primary care doctors (both associated with the government as well as NGOs) visit on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian Crisis Situational Analysis, 19 December 2023, Data Friendly Space and IMPACT, available [here](#)

**Figure 8: Barriers to access healthcare services**

Lack of specialized health care services	171	46.6%
Lack of available health facility	143	39.0%
Distance – lack of transportation means to access facilities	138	37.6%
Cost associated with transportation to facilities	112	30.5%
Cost of the services provided/medication	91	24.8%
Lack/shortage of medication	28	7.6%
Long waiting time	16	4.4%
Not accessible for persons with disabilities	16	4.4%
Safety risks associated with access to/presence at health facility	15	4.1%
Requirement for civil documentation	6	1.6%
Other	2	0.5%
Discrimination/restriction of access	1	0.3%
Language barriers	1	0.3%

“There are no normal roads between some settlements. Public transport is also not available everywhere. Buses were stolen during the occupation. [...] For example, in order for people to get to the hospital from the nearest village of Zhuklia [Koriukivskyi raion, Chernihiv Oblast], they need to call a taxi, which costs 310 UAH. There is no bus service in the village either.”

Key informants (health workers), Sumy and Chernihiv Oblasts

There is an unmet need for essential items such as mobility devices and specialised services such as ophthalmology and dental care. Specialists are rarely found in local healthcare services, requiring patients, especially older individuals and persons with disability who often require more comprehensive and complex care, to travel to regional facilities, although public transports are not barrier-free.

**“There is a lack of paediatric care in Bouryn [city in Sumy Oblast], as the local hospital does not have a paediatrician. There used to be a maternity hospital, but it is now closed. It's concerning that many departments have been shut down, and accessing many services now requires a trip to the raion centre.”**

FGD participant, Sumy Oblast

Access to medicine and medical tests is difficult due to high prices. Caregivers participating in FGDs in western oblasts expressed that the most challenging aspect of being a single caregiver is meeting the medical needs of their children. Some mentioned having to prioritise spending on medications and treatment for their children, even to the extent of saving on food expenses. They noted the lack of support from the state and the absence of humanitarian organisations that could provide more than basic medical care. Those residing in frontline areas seem to be the most adversely affected.

FGD participants and household respondents acknowledged a shortage of pharmacies in rural areas of Zaporizhzhia oblast, and in some cases a limited selection of medicines, forcing many to travel to Zaporizhzhia city to purchase prescribed drugs. Due to the considerable distance to the nearest pharmacy, they either rely on some- one traveling there occasionally or wait for weeks until their own travel expenses become justifiable.

## Right to work

A considerable percentage of individuals surveyed indicated having at least one household member out of work and actively searching for employment, a figure that remains notably high at 17% (187 respondents), climbing to 25% for IDP respondents. Consistent with findings from previous reporting periods, the primary contributing factors to unemployment were identified as the scarcity of job opportunities (72%), followed by physical impairments or limitations (17%) and responsibilities related to housework and caring for children (12%). Discrimination based on age was also reported by FGD participants in both Mykolaiv and Kherson oblasts. Additionally, it was reported that the employment opportunities that are available frequently come with low wages and non-professional roles.

The agri-food sector, a key pillar of Ukraine's economy, has been particularly affected since the escalation of the conflict, with profound shocks on rural households that rely exclusively on agriculture for their livelihoods. KIs in agricultural regions of Dnipropetrovska oblast, particularly in Apostolivskiyi and Nikopolskiyi raions, report that many families, including the displaced population, have experienced job losses, including within the agricultural sector, salary reductions, and shortened working hours since the onset of the war, primarily due to security concerns.

In the surveyed northern and eastern oblasts, the shortage of livelihood opportunities has been identified as a key factor prompting individuals and households to consider relocation, with plans to initiate the move after winter period ends. FGD participants in Donetsk oblast emphasised that IDPs are reluctant to return mainly due to the lack of income generating opportunities in their areas of origin.

**“IDPs who have found a job in their new area will not return due to the lack of jobs here.”**

FGD participant, Donetsk Oblast

Conversely, challenges finding work in areas of displacement, including due to discrimination based on displacement status, can encourage return movements<sup>28</sup>.

**Figure 9: Main source of income**

Social protection payments (pensions, allowances, etc.)	860	77.3%
Salary – Formal Employment	331	29.7%
Humanitarian Assistance (Cash or In Kind)	242	21.7%
Casual (Temporary) Labour	90	8.1%
No resource coming into the household	17	1.5%
Assistance from Family/Friends	16	1.4%
Savings	13	1.2%
Other	12	1.1%
Business/Self Employment	6	0.5%
Debt	2	0.2%

The constrained job market not only diminishes purchasing power but also exacerbates economic hardship, aggravated by continuous hikes in the prices of essential goods.

<sup>28</sup> Thematic Brief, “Winterization – Shelter, Heating and Needs”, December 2023, IOM, available [here](#)

Due to limited livelihood and economic opportunities, a significant portion of the Ukrainian population currently relies on social protection schemes and humanitarian assistance. In line with the previous monitoring period, 77% of respondents (860 individuals) reported social protection payments as their primary source of income across surveyed oblasts. This dependence on social protection is more pronounced among IDPs, with 93% relying on these payments as their main income source. In contrast, only 30% of respondents (331 individuals) mentioned salaries from formal as employment contributing to their household income. Notably, a higher proportion of respondents, specifically 54% (602 individuals), reported gaps in meeting their basic needs compared to the previous monitoring period (45% - 456 individuals). To address these gaps, 27% reduced food consumption, 26% spent savings, 17% cut down on essential medicines or healthcare services, and 13% depended on support from family/external assistance. Additionally, 25% reported not having any coping strategy in place.

## Recommendations

### To the authorities

- Support the establishment/re-establishment of primary health and specialised healthcare services in rural and conflict-affected areas where these are absent/lacking, including through providing incentives aimed at both attracting and retaining skilled healthcare personnel.
- Improve transportation infrastructure to connect underserved villages and communities with essential services.
- Support the deployment of mobile notarial offices to provide services in remote areas.
- Provide specialised and free transportation for people with disabilities and severe medical conditions, including areas outside the scope of the cities.
- Promote awareness initiatives regarding the securitization of property rights.
- Raise awareness among affected communities about the importance and ways of seeking psychological support.
- Ensure accessibility to solid fuels and heating appliances, especially for highly vulnerable individuals and households.
- Ensure systematic exploration of alternative accommodation solutions before closing collective sites and extend the eviction notice period as stipulated in Resolution #930.
- Ensure information, including on available services, ways to access them and eligibility criteria, is available in multiple diversified formats, adequately channeled using different communication methods, taking needs of less tech-savvy population groups and marginalised communities into consideration, and ensuring physical reach of hard-to-reach communities.

## To the humanitarian community

- Upscale the provision of MHPSS programmes to meet the needs of individuals and communities, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Raise awareness among affected communities about the importance of and ways of seeking psychological support.
- Improve information provision concerning registering and delivering cash assistance and using delivery modalities accessible for all groups.
- Provide protection case management support for highly vulnerable individuals facing protection risks, addressing gaps in the coverage of the national social protection programme.
- Enhance service mapping efforts to bolster referral mechanisms, ensuring the inclusion of diverse service providers including non-governmental and governmental services.
- Increase the provision of legal awareness and legal assistance to support affected communities in accessing documentation and remedies.
- Advocacy efforts are required with the government regarding the challenging securitization of land and property rights, which includes facilitating access to the compensation mechanism for damaged or destroyed property.
- Advocacy efforts are still required with the government regarding the restrictions of the Law on Compensation for Destroyed and Damaged Property.
- Support the realisation of durable solutions targeting vulnerable groups, including institutional support and community-based care & support. Ensure that access to dignified livelihoods are a key priority of durable solutions interventions to address the gaps in access to income generating opportunities.
- Advocacy efforts are required with the government regarding the challenges in collective sites in implementing resolution #930 and the potential risks of forced eviction that may arise related to this. Support collective sites in aligning with minimum standards and identifying alternative accommodation solutions.
- Address the prominent need for building and repair materials, and ensure the most vulnerable are prioritized to receive shelter repair and rehabilitation support.
- Ensure timely and sufficient winterisation initiatives which prioritize the most vulnerable, including through the provision of solid fuels and heating appliances.
- Support governmental institutions and employees with capacity enhancement on protection-related issues to increase the quality of service provision.

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