

A Trail of Death and Destruction

Russian War Crimes, Human Rights Violations and the Evolving Needs in Ukraine

Report based on the findings of the international VOSTOK SOS/ DRA
human rights mission to Ukraine



Imprint

DRA e.V.
Badstraße 44
D-13357 Berlin
Tel. +49 (0)30 446 680 12
Fax. +49 (0)30 446 680 10

info@austausch.org
www.austausch.org
www.civicmonitoring.org

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Main authors: Ioulia Shukan, Imke Hansen
Editors: Tim Bohse, Yuliya Krasynikova, Evhen Vasyliev

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the Russian Federation has continuously and systemically violated international law and human rights. Shelling and aerial bombing of civilian targets, using banned ammunition such as cluster bombs, assaults on evacuation convoys, medical institutions, and medical vehicles – the list of violations is long and growing. Occupation, captivity, arbitrary killings, systemic rape, torture, shelling, and bombing have killed and injured thousands and traumatized millions.

Moreover, it has caused heavy damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, administrative buildings, bridges, and private houses. 14 million people have been forced to flee their homes, with 8 million internally displaced persons and 6,7 million seeking refuge abroad.¹

The Ukrainian charitable organization, Vostok-SOS, and the German NGO DRA conducted a monitoring mission between May 3 and 12, 2022. An international team with

members from Ukraine, Germany, France, and the Czech Republic including a member from the German/Swiss Human Rights Organisation Libereco Partnership for Human Rights monitored human rights violations, violations of international law, and consequent local humanitarian problems and needs in the Chernihiv, Kyiv, and Sumy regions. Russian armed forces withdrew from these regions in late March 2022, leaving a trail of death and destruction. Consequently, inhabitants and local authorities are facing challenges, including a dire humanitarian situation, the need to reconstruct thousands of homes and significant infrastructure, and recovery. The mission also monitored the situation with internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Zakarpattia region, where high numbers of IDPs are straining local capacities and infrastructure.



A tank drove over this car in the village Yahidne

¹ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ukraine/>

The consequences of Russian warfare in the monitored regions of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, and Zakarpattia

The Kyiv region has been under Russian military attack since February 24. Heavy fighting took place around Kyiv, with Russian forces trying to isolate the Ukrainian capital on both banks of the Dnipro River. The North-West of Kyiv became a scene of war crimes in March 2022, particularly the towns and villages under Russian occupation, among them Bucha, Irpin, and Borodyanka.

The monitoring team visited the villages of Katyzanka (Vyshhorod district), Andriivka (Makariv district), and Fenevychi (Ivankivski district), which had faced arbitrary executions of civilians, torture, destruction of infrastructure and housing, and large-scale looting. In late May, Ukrainian law enforcement officers confirmed the deaths of 1290 residents in the Kyiv region.

Bordering both Belarus and Russia, the Chernihiv region was affected by artillery shelling, aerial bombardment, and occupation from the first day of the full-scale invasion. The mission team monitored the situation in the city of Chernihiv and the villages of Kolychivka, Ivanivka, and Yahidne. The city of Chernihiv was under Russian attack from February 24 until April 1. Combat heavily destroyed several villages northeast of Chernihiv. In Novoselivka, for example, 280 out of 328 family homes are ruins. In May, the region's prosecutor, Serhiy Vasylyna, stated that 477 civilians were killed and 72 are missing.² The prosecutor's office is investigating execution, torture, and arbitrary detention cases. For example, in the village of Yahidne, the Russian military detained eight local officials and abducted one to Russia.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Sumy region experienced a comparatively high number of aerial bombings and the occupation of towns and villages, causing the death of 149 civilians. The monitoring team visited the town of Okhtyrka (42 000 residents), 30 km from the Russian border, which was heavily shelled on February 26, March 3, 8, and 14, leading to 30 civilian deaths. The team also monitored human rights violations in the neighboring town of Trostyanets (20 000 residents), where 50 people were killed during the Russian occupa-

tion, and 18 remain missing. In Trostyanets, several cases of torture are under investigation.

The city of Sumy itself was not occupied but was shelled. The regional prosecutor's office kept working and gathered evidence on war crimes throughout the spring. As a result, 21-year-old Russian soldier Vadim Shishimarin received a life sentence for killing an unarmed civilian in the first war crimes trial in Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.³

The monitoring team also studied the situation with IDPs in the Zakarpattia region, in Kolchins'ka (Mukachevo district) and Kholmivka (Uzhhorod district) as well as in the city of Uzhhorod. Zakarpattia is considered a relatively safe place due to its proximity to four EU countries and the low shelling frequency. The Russian missile shelling of the railway power substation in Volovets on May 3, 2022, was the first case of Russian aggression against civilian infrastructure in the region.

With 410,000 IDPs in relation to 1,1 million residents, Zakarpattia is even outnumbering the Lviv region with 440,000 IDPs to 2,5 million residents. The pressure on the social, medical, and health infrastructure is high.

Human rights violations by the Russian Federation

The monitoring mission identified numerous human rights violations by the armed forces of the Russian Federation that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Abuses against civilians and atrocities committed by the Russian military in an unrestrained manner and with total impunity are of such magnitude that it is necessary to raise the question of their systemic and intentional nature.

Deliberate attacks on civilian targets

As respondents in the regions of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy reported, Russian artillery and air force targeted homes and civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and evacuating civilians. This increased the threat to civilians, interrupted the water, electricity, and food supply, and made evacuation and humanitarian aid very difficult. Many civilians died from shelling, and millions of people spent days and weeks in bomb shelters, often with a lack of space, air, water, and food.

2 Interview, May 6, 2022.

3 <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-soldier-war-crime-guilty/31863487.html>



In the city of Oktyrka, where the Ukrainian army halted the advance of Russian troops, administrative and residential buildings, a thermal power station, water pipes, and drains heavily suffered from shelling



Entering the village of Ivanivka, Chernihiv region, on March 5, the Russian military fired on private homes, sometimes damaging almost every house on the street



Destroyed residential building in Okhtyrka in the Sumy region



The contrast between war damages and board notes from the last regular day is striking, school in Kolychivka / Chernihiv Region

Shelling educational facilities: the school of Kolychivka

March 4-30, 2022, the Kolychivka school south of Chernihiv was regularly shelled from the nearby occupied village of Ivanivka while 150 civilians were taking shelter in the school's basement. School director Valentina Teplukha took the monitoring mission around the heavily destroyed school premises. The village's encirclement and the firing intensity, which peaked from March 7 to 9, made evacuation and humanitarian supply practically impossible. After March 4, there was no bread delivery for the duration of the Russian military presence. Teplukha reported the courage of some local volunteers who went out to organize food and prevented the village inhabitants in the school from starving.

The Russian occupational regime

In many places, the Russian military expelled civilians from their homes to set up their quarters. They also took over administrative buildings, schools, and other public buildings to set up quarters or firing positions.

The occupation forces systematically installed heavy explosive weapons (artillery pieces, tanks) in public places, residential areas, gardens, and vegetable plots. Among the monitored sites, this was the case in Yahidne and Ivanivka (Chernihiv region), Trostyanets (Sumy region), Katyzhanka, and Andriivka (Kyiv region).

Russian troops systematically sought local authorities' representatives in the occupied settlements to neutralize or «invite» them to collaborate. The village heads and mayors reacted differently to this threat. Trostyanets' mayor, Yuri Bova, managed to flee after soldiers searched for him and continued to organize the evacuation of locals while in hiding. Hanna Osacha, village head (starosta) of Katyuzhanka, moved to another apartment and remained unidentified by Russian troops. Halyna Kozachenko, the village head of Fenevychi, revealed her position and negotiated with the Russian soldiers, preventing the installation of Russian soldiers in residents' houses and achieving an agreed geographical distance between the village and the Russian checkpoint.

Civilians were subject to various threats: Russian soldiers threatened to shoot every third person if owners of laptops and smart watches did not turn them in. Women



Damaged school in Kolychivka

also feared sexual violence: «I prohibited my 15-year-old daughter from staying out for long periods during authorized outings. Every time she went out, I made her put on a loose, shapeless jacket to age her. The Russians were looking for young women, and one woman managed to trick them into not taking her upstairs,»⁴ reports Halyna, a 47-year-old respondent from Yahidne. She is not aware of any cases of sexual violence at Yahidne, but testimonies on this matter may emerge later as they are difficult to share.

⁴ Testimony collected on May 8, 2022.



Russian soldiers managed to devastate Katyuzhanka's library in only 24 hours. They burned Ukrainian literature to keep warm, reported the librarian

The perception of Russian soldiers: primitive, destructive, and worsening with time

«The first week, Russian soldiers behaved more or less adequately. Sometimes they let our emergency doctors leave to treat the wounded or even bring them to the hospital,» says Hanna Shvedtsova. Later, when the Russians left, the Buryats arrived, and finally, the forces of the self-proclaimed «Donetsk People's Republic («DPR»)» With each new shift, the attitude towards us deteriorated. The «DPR» soldiers were the cruelest of all. They said they would make us pay for their region's past eight years of war. They did not let us provide medical care. One lady had a stroke, but they would not let her relatives take her to the hospital.»⁵

The monitoring team collected similar accounts from other occupied villages and towns: locals perceived the first rotation as relatively harmless, the following as worse, and the last as the most destructive. There is a clear connection between the growing pressure of a counter-offensive, failing to conquer Ukraine in a «Blitzkrieg,» and suffering losses, and the increasing violence against the civilian population. The worst atrocities were committed in the second half of March.

Moreover, locals highlighted the cruelty of particular battalions. Witnesses reported that units from the «DPR» were fierce, as in Trostyanets (Sumy region). In Yahidne (Chernihiv region), locals reported abuses by Russian soldiers from Tuva, and in Katyuzhinka by soldiers from



Russian military set up headquarters of about 500 soldiers in Katyuzhanka's elementary school, causing damage of 5 million UAN, says school director Mykola Mikitchik. They used the sports grounds as a helicopter landing area and for decoration ceremonies for soldiers. They dug 37 trenches for heavy artillery on school territory to shell the neighboring villages. The damage is estimated to be 5 million UAN

5 Testimony collected on May 9, 2022

Medical institutions under attack: the hospital of Trostyanets

Russian shelling has also targeted medical facilities, as was the case of the hospital in Trostyanets during the occupation. The 4th armored Kantemirovkaya division set up a checkpoint that isolated the hospital from the city. Patients and medical personnel, around 60 people, could not leave, and wounded and sick people could not reach it. Only in a few exceptional cases did relatives succeed in bringing someone to the hospital during the occupation. In these challenging conditions, the staff continued caring for the trapped patients, cooking meals in the courtyard, treating 28 wounded people, and delivering eight babies to seven women. Much of the care, including births, happened in the hospital's basement, which served as a bomb shelter.

The occupying forces appeared to deny access to medical care intentionally and systematically. Moreover, this was anticipated by some locals. Hanna Shvedtsova, one of the hospital directors, reported that pregnant women arrived before their due date as they feared not getting in amid combat or occupation.

According to Shvedtsova, the artillery shelling on March 18 marked an intensification of warfare around the hospital. «The occupiers were under pressure, attacked by our troops, and suffering heavy losses. Our army defeated all their attempts to force their way to Poltava or Sumy and from there to Kyiv. The remnants of the defeated Russian army found themselves in Trostyanets and cracked down on us. There was only one option left to us: to try to flee. On March 24, we tried to evacuate, leaving some twelve colleagues with about twenty immobile patients». Shvedtsova accompanied a woman who had just given birth on her way home: «God was with us. We did not blow up on the numerous bobby traps on the hospital territory, and we managed to hide from the Russian soldiers. We managed to save ourselves. The next day, the Russians left».

Buryatia. To learn more about the background of such perceptions requires an examination of Russian army recruitment, promotion within the army, and individual motivation. Particularly for people from the poorest areas of Russia, the significant social promotion that comes with an army career is appealing.

The degree of violence in Russian society, such as violence in upbringing and socialization, and violence as a means of maintaining hierarchy in the army, facilitates the violent behavior of soldiers.

The perception of Russian soldiers seems also defined by the destruction and litter they left behind. In all the localities the monitoring team visited, looting of shops,



Trostyanets hospital is a new build hospital with a well-equipped polyclinic. Due to shelling and bombing, a lot of equipment and parts of the buildings were destroyed. The hospital leadership is very engaged in restoring the function of all hospital departments as fast as possible



Looted hard discs at the school in Katyzhanka

Headquarter and detention place – the railway station of Trostyanets`

The Russian military used railway station as a headquarters and detention place. Station manager, Olga Trypilska, showed the team a room in the basement with multiple blood traces on the wall. She reported that the stairs down to the room were full of blood when she saw it the day after the withdrawal of the Russian troops and that locals found five detainees whose hands were tied with iron wires. According to the mayor Yuriï Bova, about 30 people passed through this improvised detention place. One of them was Ruslan, an electrician of the city's electrical networks. Russian soldiers arrested him while he repaired damaged electric cables on the street. «The Russians banned us from moving around the city. If you move around, you are a spy of the Ukrainian army. Even though I told them I was an electrician, they still arrested me and forced me to undress completely. They looked for military tattoos on my body and asked me if I had served in the army but found nothing on me. I was lucky. My neighbor went out to get water from the well, and they killed him.»¹ Inspecting men's bodies for patriotic or military tattoos or weapon marks on the shoulder revealing combat activity is a systematic practice.

In total, out of nearly 20,000 inhabitants of Trostyanets, nearly 50 died, six were tortured, 30 were taken prisoner, and 36 were missing (as of May 2022).

1 Testimony collected on May 8, 2022.

pharmacies, public establishments, and private houses was systematic. Technical and household items like laptops and washing machines were particularly sought-after objects. In the school of Katyuzhanka, more than 40 new computers, 30 projectors, and several interactive boards were stolen or partly stolen, and thus broken. Many other valuable items, as well as items of low value such as dishes and tableware, disappeared.

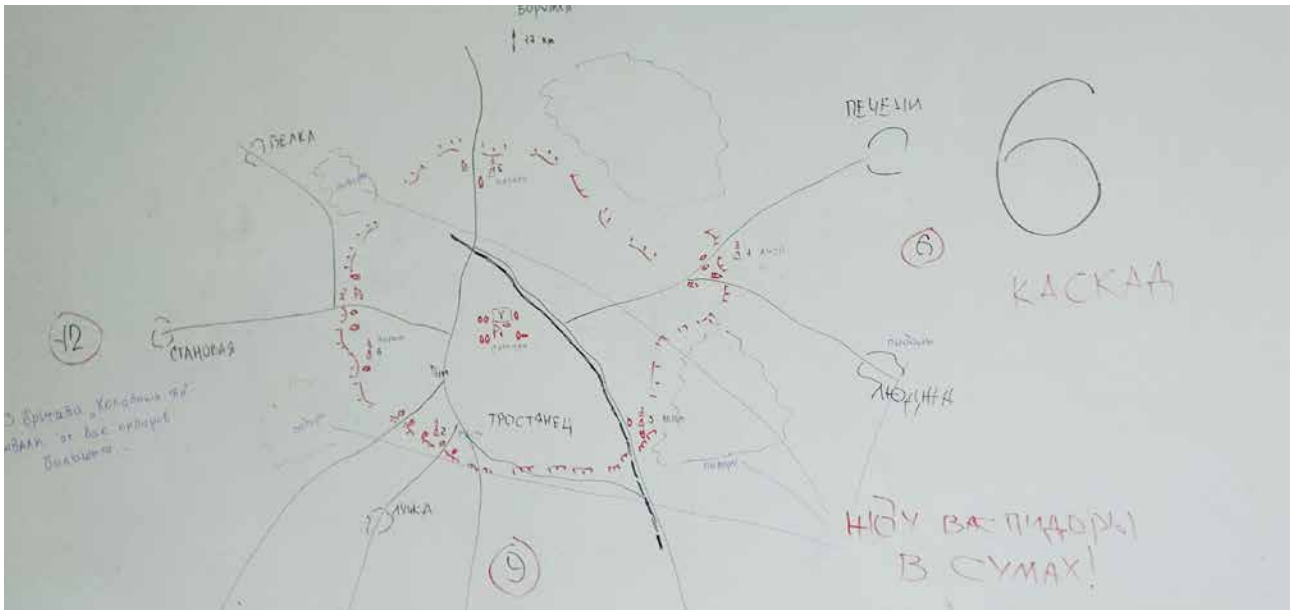
The school director expressed bewilderment when explaining how the soldiers cut off the screen canvas from its mounting instead of taking the whole projection screen from the wall. He stated that Russian soldiers did

not know how to use many everyday items and often did not understand what they looted, simply taking everything that seemed valuable. Other respondents in formerly occupied settlements told similar stories that pointed to the soldier's backwardness. One story that circulated in different places described Russian soldiers as not knowing how to use an electric kettle. Such attitudes may serve to explain the extent of looting by the Russian military. They may also be a coping strategy for individual and collective violent experiences.

When Russian soldiers withdrew from the school, they left complete chaos. Apart from looting, they cut cables,



Traces of blood in the basement of Trostyanets railway station



A map with military positions and weaponry types drawn on the wall of a room on the second floor of Trostyanets' railway station. Apart from the map, graffiti insulting Ukrainians can be found on other walls "Fags (Ukrainians), I'm waiting for you in Sumy."

destroyed communication devices, broke doors, and left enormous amounts of litter. They also left maps, lists of personnel, decoration orders, and other documents behind, clearly having retreated in haste.

All respondents expressed dismay regarding the condition of premises, buildings, and rooms where Russians lived. The unbelievable amounts of litter and damage raised the question, «who does such things?» which was repeatedly asked in all places.

Many respondents from the Kyiv region called for justice and the persecution and punishment of war criminals. In the regions of Chernihiv and Sumy, respondents rarely tackled the topic of justice. Instead, they expressed fear that Russian troops would return and hostilities would resume and longed for a return to the normality of pre-February 24. All respondents identified the Russian army as responsible for shelling, violence against civilians, and damage to civilian infrastructure.

Arbitrary detention, torture, and killing

In every formerly occupied place the monitoring mission visited, the team heard stories or found traces of detention, attacks on civilians' physical integrity, killings, or summary executions.

A school's basement in Katyuzhanka (Kyiv region) also became a detention center. According to the school director, Mykola Mikitchik, about 14 civilians were held there, and ten were taken to Russia. In the nearby village of An-

driivka, the mission met a former detainee. At the end of February 2022, Russian soldiers arrested him on his way home. For seven days, he was detained with his hands and feet tied and without food in the cold basement. He got frostbite on his hands and feet and now walks with difficulty and cannot feel his left arm. He was taken to a prison in Kursk, Russia, and was subjected to interrogations by the Russian FSB with physical abuse. He assumes he was transferred to Crimea - his eyes were covered with tape-, and became part of the prisoners' exchange between Ukraine and Russia on April 14, 2022.

Russian troops carried out arbitrary executions of civilians. In Andriivka, nearly 40 civilians are reported to have died during the month of occupation, and this figure is not final. One example is Yuriy Kravchenya, who was shot in front of his house on March 9, 2022, allegedly for providing the Ukrainian army with information about Russian military positions. His wife escaped the execution, begging the occupants to let her live as the mother of two children. Yuriy's parents went to the Russian checkpoint with a white sheet attached to a stick to get permission to bury their son in the cemetery. The soldiers ordered them to bury him in the garden of his own house.⁶

In Ivanivka (Chernihiv region), the Russian military executed a man in his sixties on March 9, 2022, in his son's house at 11 Vishneva Street. When the son, Oleksandr, realized he could not contact his father, he went to his house, despite the danger during the occupation. He

6 Testimony collected on May 11, 2022.

Using civilians as a human shield – the case of Yahidne

In the village of Yahidne (Chernihiv region), Russians held nearly 350 civilians, including at least 50 children, from 3 to March 30 in the basement of the village school. Not all the detained were locals – some had just fled Chernihiv and believed staying with their relatives in Yahidne would be the safer option. The presence of civilians served as protection for the Russians as they had set up positions above on the ground and first floor of the school. Russian forces deployed artillery on the territory of the school, and in the streets, courtyards, and vegetable gardens.

For 28 days, people endured unimaginable conditions – constantly kept in the cold, damp basement without any room to move, sleeping on the floor or chairs, and suffering from hunger. The above-mentioned Yahidne inhabitant, Halyna, reported staying in a room of 7x7m with 36 other people. Occasionally, Russian soldiers allowed them to fetch food from their homes. But the soldiers permitted the detainees to be away only for 10 minutes. Halyna feared she would not manage, but others brought provisions that they shared with fellow detainees.

The people in the basement were cut off from contact with the outside world as the occupiers confiscated their cell phones to ensure they could not share details about Russian positions, troops, and weapons. In all settlements formerly under occupation, people reported this practice.

During these 28 days, Yahidne's detainees fell ill, including small children and the elderly, with chicken pox, indigestion, infections, and coughs. Ten people died. First, the Russian soldiers did not allow burial in the cemetery, so the bodies remained in the coal bunker and were buried later in a grave in the cemetery. Russians shot at two men who buried the dead, giving them leg injuries. When Russian troops withdrew hastily on March 30, the detainees waited another day before leaving the basement out of terror. Returning home, many found their places looted or devastated by Russian soldiers.

found his home in ruins, with the half-burned bones of his father inside, which he then buried in his grandmother's garden. A Russian armored vehicle was parked in the house's garden. Through neighbors' testimonies and relics such as bullet casings, Oleksandr reconstructed what happened. When Russian soldiers evicted civilians to install headquarters and concentrate armor in this part of the village, his father refused to leave. Two soldiers entered the house, shot his father three times, opened the gas as they left, and threw a grenade inside.⁷

Killing civilians during evacuation

Acts of violence caused terror among the Ukrainian population. Respondents from all formerly occupied settlements the team visited reported that they hardly left their homes and took refuge in their basements. Many refused to evacuate, fearing being shot on the way, as there were

numerous such cases. Russians even shelled cars with white flags and the word «children» written on them.

The administrative head of the village of Katyuzhanka told of one case of a fleeing family. The daughter survived and was taken to the hospital by the local priest, but her parents were killed. The Russian military prohibited entering the cemetery, so locals buried them at the village school. Three residents shared the same fate, and another three were injured.

In early March, a similar situation occurred in Yahidne. Russians fired on a fleeing family of four, killing the parents and the oldest daughter. They brought the 13-year-old daughter to the local school's basement, where about 350 residents were locked up.

It was not until March 12 that the first cars managed to escape from Katyuzhanka to nearby Demidova, from where evacuation to Kyiv was possible. In Trostyanets, the first evacuation by bus and private vehicles took place in mid-March.

⁷ Testimony collected on May 8, 2022.

Challenges of hosting IDPs in the Zakarpattia region

Many people who fled from territories under combat or occupation went to Western Ukraine. Zakarpattia was considered a particularly safe place due to its remote location and proximity to several EU countries. Multiple waves of IDPs reflect the evolution of hostilities in the more Eastern regions: in February-March, the IDPs came mainly from the Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Zaporizhzhia regions. At the time of the mission, new arrivals came primarily from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and from the occupied territories of southern Ukraine.

Of the 400,000 IDPs in the Zakarpattia region - 45.5% women and 33% children – 300,000 live in private homes, rented flats, or hotels – usually at their own expense. 100,000 are accommodated in public facilities, primarily kindergartens and schools. Families stay in classrooms, and sleep on mattresses on the floor, camp beds, or even sunbeds. They get three meals a day and access to sanitation and shower facilities at the shelter or through bus transportation to public baths.

The distribution of IDPs to local communities is not evenly spread. This is leading to some small communities

struggling to cope as the number of IDPs is overwhelming their capacities. For example, the Kolchins'ka community (Mukachevo district, 9,850 inhabitants) hosts 2,287 IDPs, whereas the Kholmiv'ska community (Uzhhorod district, 17,000 inhabitants) hosts 2,000. The Kholmiv'ska municipality accommodated 200 IDPs in three of their six schools and one of their four kindergartens – so there are still functioning kindergartens in the area. The head of the smaller Kolchins'ka community, which provided shelter in 11 public buildings to 509 people in March and 411 in May, Mykola Dubko, complained that the nearby community of Chonodiiv'ska hosts only 16 IDPs, whereas his community is under strain. These disparities originate in the state of emergency that framed the beginning of the evacuation. For the municipalities, it is not only a question of lacking space but also lacking finances. According to Dubko, his community has enough funds to host IDPs until October-November 2022.

So far, municipalities have borne a large part of the financial burden. They take the funds from local development budgets, suspending ongoing development projects. The Kolchins'ka community had to stop the construction of a school, while the Kholmiv'ska community spent funds reserved for road infrastructure maintenance. The regional administration plans to add 20 million UAN to the local budgets.



In Yahidne, traces of Russian military presence are everywhere. Russian army food boxes, empty liquor bottles, military gear, and soldiers' personal items are spread across the school premises. Burnt vehicles, pieces of shells, and other combat remnants line the streets

Attitudes towards the shelters and IDPs vary. Whereas in some places, the staff members are very involved, in others, one can sense fatigue. Many people express concerns that the presence of IDPs might prevent the schools from opening on September 1 for regular students. These worries and wishes can potentially create tensions between locals and IDPs. The monitoring team felt these tensions during a visit to one of the Kolchins'ka schools, which currently shelters 71 IDPs: while the school staff asked when the school would reopen, IDPs expressed worries about what would happen to them.

The capacity and ideas of town/village heads, the school directors, and the staff significantly determine the everyday life in a shelter. Municipalities like Kolchins'ka focus on providing food, sanitation access, and essential non-food items such as clothes, while struggling with additional care – often out of the lack of capacity, experience, and understanding of what IDPs need. Other shelters offer volunteer employment for adults, playing circles with external volunteers for the children, and other activities. In a Kholmiv'ska school, the teachers provide master classes for displaced children, in addition to the online courses for regular students. The municipality also organized a rehabilitative stay for displaced women with children in Hungary.

The differences between shelters are reflected in the conditions for IDPs. In shelters with more activities, involvement of IDPs in daily tasks, and contact with local people, the IDPs seem more agile, attentive, and stable.

Needs assessment and recommendations: mitigating the consequences of the Russian invasion

The primary tasks in heavily destroyed villages and towns are demining, reconstruction of housing and critical infrastructure, and maintaining public health. In regions with many IDPs, the maintenance and enlargement of infrastructure and the care of the IDPs is also necessary. Therefore, Ukraine needs humanitarian aid, demining and construction assistance, medical and psycho-social support, and economic investment. Moreover, international support in the criminal persecution of war criminals is necessary.

Landmines

Anti-personnel, anti-vehicle mines, and unexploded ammunition threaten the physical integrity and the lives of millions of people in the combat-affected and formerly occupied territories of Ukraine. As the mined areas are not mapped, it will take years to find and remove all of them. Mine contamination makes it unsafe for people to return to their daily life. Only recently, a car hit a landmine when driving in the forest to fetch wood in the Kyiv region. Mining also constitutes an obstacle to reconstruction efforts and hampers international investment in construction.

Mine-affected areas need assistance in demining and the support of mine-awareness training for the population. In many regions of Ukraine, landmines severely limit access to nature. Rehabilitative residencies in non-mined parts of Ukraine and other countries are helpful for people as access to nature is an essential means of maintaining health.

Accommodation

Accommodating people who have lost their homes is another major challenge for the Ukrainian government on every level. In combat-affected regions, the regional administration does not offer temporary accommodation in kindergartens or schools as they fear that places where people are concentrated could become targets of aerial bombing. So far, many homeless people have relied on their private networks, staying with neighbors, relatives, or renting a flat.

In regions with many IDPs, like Zakarpattia, housing for IDPs is a problem consistently raised.. As the situation was an emergency, the sheltering of IDPs was organized in an improvised, short-term-oriented matter. Thus, it is now necessary to come up with longer-term solutions. The issue is pressing as the schools and kindergartens currently serving as shelters are supposed to return to their usual function on September 1, 2022. In the Kolchis'ka community, the local club is the only available place to shelter IDPs when schools start working, but it does not have a canteen. Moreover, local communities lack the funds to provide shelter and nutrition.

All affected municipalities are currently considering housing solutions for IDPs and people who have lost their homes to shelling or aerial bombing. Some are thinking about providing accommodation containers or building prefab houses. The head of Kholmiv'ska municipality, Tetiana Vachylia, plans to sign a memorandum with a British fund to construct a village of prefab houses for 500 people. The project is attractive as the location offers workplaces in factories located on the community's territory.

Regional authorities are concerned that settlements of containers or prefab houses could become ghettos, so they prioritize permanent housing. They suggest acquiring available apartments until new houses are ready for occupancy. Zakarpattia regional administration's deputy head, Petro Dobromil'skyi, states that these new-build houses could be used even after the IDPs have returned home. However, the Zakarpattia administration estimates that about 200,000 IDPs will likely stay.

In the meantime, the local communities are trying to solve the most urgent accommodation problems. In Bobrovytsa, north-east of Chernihiv, the homeless stay in the hospital, while in Trostyanets, former residents of destroyed buildings around the railway station now live on the premises of the chocolate factory.

Regarding the need for accommodation, support from and collaboration with the international community is necessary. All local officials signaled openness and gratitude for any contact that would help them mitigate the housing problem.

Humanitarian aid

Although in many communities, the first critical phase of a dire humanitarian situation has come to an end, humanitarian aid is still very much needed. Some international organizations that provided emergency aid in the first months have stopped, and private donations are decreasing. Many Ukrainian organizations and initiatives cur-

rently lack humanitarian cargo. The responsible people in the regional administrations of Chernihiv and Sumy stress that while people are not starving, humanitarian aid is still needed. Also, in places with many IDPs, demand exceeds supply. Zakarpattia local and regional administration officials identified food, clothing, hygiene products, and medicine as the main demands. Tetiana Vachyla, chairwoman of the Kholmiv'ska community council, says she buys medicine privately because she is not allowed to use community funds for this purpose, as the government has imposed limitations on wartime purchases.⁸

Ukrainian volunteers play a crucial role in the care of IDPs. The monitoring team met with the volunteer group, Sila Ouzhhoroda (The Strength of Uzhgorod), who have provided food assistance and, on a smaller scale, medical aid, non-food items, and shelter to IDPs at Uzhgorod's railway station since February. Whereas in the first weeks, 10,000 to 15,000 IDPs arrived at Uzhgorod, by May the number had decreased to 2,000/3,000.⁹ The initiative has nearly 200 volunteers with various socio-professional profiles, 150 of whom have themselves fled the war from the Kharkiv, Kyiv, or Luhansk regions. Sila Uzhhoroda benefits from multiple forms of support (churches, local entrepreneurs, Ukrainian diaspora, international humanitarian NGOs) and is one example of many volunteer networks throughout Ukraine.

These volunteer networks risk disappearing due to a lack of resources. Thus, international organizations must cooperate with local initiatives to keep the volunteer support of people in need alive.

In general, the provision and sponsorship of humanitarian assistance is still a task for the international community. Systematic and long-term assistance programs are much needed.

Medical aid

As the Russian army did not spare medical institutions from shelling, medical infrastructure was heavily damaged. The before-mentioned hospital in Trostyanets is one such example. The reconstruction of medical facilities, including the purchase of costly medical equipment, is an urgent task. Medical facilities need donors and partners who will help them reestablish functioning wards and high-standard medical care. The transport of medical aid, including medicine and other medical and rehabilitation equipment, is needed throughout Ukraine. Particularly hospitals of secondary care that treat peo-

⁸ Interview, May 4, 2022.

⁹ May 4, 2022.

ple brought from the combat-affected areas in the East require significant support. In the regions with many IDPs, polyclinics and hospitals need to increase their capacities to cope with the increased number of patients.

Reconstruction: private housing, public buildings, and civil infrastructure

The destruction of civilian infrastructure and facilities as a consequence of combat or Russian military presence has not been fully assessed yet. However, the scale of the damage is enormous. According to estimates for the Chernihiv region, 3500 buildings have been destroyed, 80% of which are civilian homes.

In Okhtyrka, aerial bombing on March 3, 2022, almost wholly destroyed the thermal power plant. If not rebuilt swiftly, this may leave a large part of the town without heating and hot water in the coming fall and winter. Moreover, reconstructing factories and power plants is necessary to provide people with employment and rebuild supply chains and the national economy. In this realm, construction material, the financing of construction work, and internationally supported construction projects are necessary. The construction industries of EU countries should be motivated to engage and invest in Ukraine. Local communities signalled their openness to any offer of international assistance or cooperation.

Many bridges have been blown up or shelled, severely limiting mobility and accessibility, sometimes causing detours of more than two hours, as when traveling from Chernihiv to Kyiv (as of May 2022). In some places, ponton bridges enable crossing; however, they are not passable for heavy vehicles.

In regions like Sumy and Chernihiv, tens of thousands of Russian tanks and other armored vehicles destroyed the pavement on the main roads. Railroad networks are also a target of aerial shelling and need repair.

Construction material and financial support for construction work are needed to facilitate the reestablishment of mobility, accessibility, and supply chains for food and other crucial items.

Obstacles to rebuilding

Private people have a great interest in rebuilding their damaged houses. However, they often lack the funds and human resources to do so. The Ukrainian State pays financial compensation in case of the destruction of a home through shelling. But due to the vast amount of

applications, the evaluation and payment process is slow. That constitutes two problems – first, people wait for their compensation for weeks and months, and second, they cannot start to clear rubble and rebuild if they have their own resources because the evaluation commission deciding on the compensation needs to see the damage in the original condition. After the commission's visit, they need to wait for the delivery of a written report that entitles them to receive compensation. Only then can people start rebuilding.

In north-eastern Ukraine, people affected by shelling expressed doubts about whether the state would support construction work soon as territories might still be affected by aerial bombing. Recent reintensifying of bombing in Sumy and regions seems to confirm the legitimacy of such concerns. For example, the town of Okhtyrka (Sumy region) was again shelled on May 17, 2022, a month and a half after the withdrawal of the Russian army, causing injuries to at least five people and material damage.¹⁰ According to Dmytro Zhyvitskyi, head of the Sumy regional administration, Ukrainian border guards have been under regular mortar fire on the Ukrainian-Russian border since mid-April.¹¹

That fact that many residents who fled Russian occupation have not yet returned to their homes constitutes another obstacle to rebuilding. Officials of the Sumy administration encourage residents to return to restart economic activities and facilitate the rebuilding of the region. However, they warn of the risks: shelling and provocations on the border with Russia, ongoing mine clearance, and explosive remnants of war.

Chernihiv administration officials are more cautious and recommend waiting until the security situation stabilizes, and the restoration of the water, gas, and electricity services are finalized. This work is well underway in the various villages and towns the mission visited: in Yahidne and Ivanivka, gas, water, electricity, and internet connectivity supplies were available in early May 2022. Demining work is also underway, visible by the yellow marks left by the deminers on the gates of the houses.

Refugees and IDPs from Chernihiv city, where almost 70% of the city's 256,000 residents had left, are already returning. The same trend is visible in Sumy and Kyiv regions.

10 <https://hromadske.ua/posts/po-ohirci-zranku-vipustili-5-raket-shonajmenshe-5-lyudej-poraneni>

11 Interview, May 10 2022.

Administrations, schools, centers of culture

In the occupied territories, systematic looting or shelling deprived the local administrations of their computers, notebooks, printers, and other items necessary to run a local administration, a court, a police station, or a procurator's office. Schools and cultural centers have lost their technical devices and many more things to looting. Communities lost their busses, school buses, and ambulances due to shelling or looting.

Donations of funds, vehicles, or technical devices are needed very much. Partnerships between schools, villages, or towns that support the local civil society constitute the most sustainable and effective support as they involve personal relationships, regular contact, expertise in what is needed and where, and possibility of capacity-building.

Infrastructural needs in the Zakarpattia region

Apart from the housing issues described above, the significant increase in residents due to the influx of IDPs is causing infrastructural needs. Dmytro Myroshnikov, deputy head of the Zakarpattia region, identifies the problem of waste processing as particularly pressing in the city of Uzhhorod, where almost 1/3 of the IDPs in Zakarpattia live. Representatives of the regional administration asked for the international community's help with waste compacting lines and recycling.

Finally, the sewage systems in different cities, especially in Uzhhorod, are overwhelmed by the increased number of people and need modernization. The regional administration estimates the modernization costs to be 40 million euros and is looking for a donor.

Another problem is domestic animals brought in large numbers by IDPs. Shelters, veterinarians, and neutering services are overwhelmed by the number of requests for care.

Last but not least, IDPs in the Zakarpattia region need employment to secure their livelihoods, therefore job opportunities need to be created. The administration encourages companies to relocate production to the region.

Mental health and psycho-social support

The psycho-social after-effects of traumatic experiences are enormous. Even though people in Ukraine show remarkable resilience on many levels, psycho-social support is much needed. The shelling and shooting of civilians, torture, and rape have left deep wounds in the affected

people, communities, and society. Loss of all material belongings, evacuation, and family separation add to the hardships people in Ukraine are currently experiencing.

On a large scale, people experience trauma symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, aggression, and the inability to connect with others. Psychotraumatization contributes to polarization, hardened group perceptions, and conflict. Resources like meeting family and friends or going out to nature are often not available due to warfare and mind contamination. Many people do not even understand why they feel the way they feel and still experience anxiety and stress, although the acute situation of artillery shelling or occupation has passed. In Yahidne, for example, where about 350 civilians were trapped for 28 days in the school's basement, resident Halyna shared her concerns about her niece and her pre-teen daughter, both of whom are afraid to leave their homes and react with panic to unexpected sounds.

Not only people affected by shelling, occupation, and IDPs require psycho-social support, but also volunteers and helpers. Numerous individuals are involved in the crisis response. Ukrainian volunteers support evacuations, distribute humanitarian aid, document human rights violations, support IDPs, and more. Many of the volunteers are either living in combat-affected areas or are themselves IDPs who have abandoned their homes, many of them not for the first time. Their sound mental health is crucial for saving lives and mitigating harm.

Psychological approaches suitable for treating trauma are not widespread in Ukraine. Methods based on psychoanalysis or cognitive-behavioral therapy show limited results in treating psycho-trauma and can even harm the beneficiary. Thus, training psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, and volunteers who support war-affected people is necessary.

To overcome overwhelming experiences, integrate traumatic memories, and restore the functioning of the nervous system, people need individual trauma therapy, trauma-informed peer support, and access to resources such as nature or spaces they perceive as (relatively) safe. Special attention needs to be given to traumatized children and teenagers. Rehabilitative residencies for individuals and families in less combat-affected areas of Ukraine or in other countries have proven very effective in mitigating stress and trauma. Moreover, war-affected people need access to information about psycho-trauma and trauma-informed approaches to stress management and stabilization.



Meeting with Serhyi Vasylyna, prosecutor of the Chernihiv region

Keeping up resilience, initiative, and agility

In these traumatic circumstances, the resilience of Ukrainians in the face of war is impressive. During the mission, the team saw countless civilians occupied with cleaning or repairing looted or damaged premises or sowing seeds in their vegetable gardens. In short, actively improving the situation and at the same time providing a sense of normality to their daily lives. The medical staff of Trostyanets hospital have already cleared, cleaned, and put in order several floors of the building and hope to be able to welcome the first patients in June. The same goes for the classrooms in the schools of Katyzhanka (Kyiv region) and Kolychivka (Chernihiv region). In the latter village, the locals told us that after the deminers had passed through, they had picked up the metal debris with a magnet so they could finally put their hands into the earth and sow potatoes.

Agility, initiative, and resilience need to be maintained. Active civilians need support to spread their activity and mobilize others. Psycho-social support, resources, aid, and facilitating positive social contact – including with people from other countries – are crucial.

Providing support for the documentation and prosecution of war crimes

In the Sumy and the Chernihiv region, the regional prosecutors and other law enforcement agencies have established teams of investigators to take witness accounts of war crimes and document the destruction of civilian infrastructure by aerial bombing and shelling. Local authorities record the destruction and damage of private property and issue official documents for the owners. Many Ukrainian and international human rights

organizations are contributing to the documentation of war crimes and human rights violations.

The deployment of international investigators, training for Ukrainian investigators on international humanitarian law, facilitation of good communication between prosecutors and regional human rights organizations, and technical help can support the prosecution of war crimes and human rights violations.

DRA e.V. is a Berlin-based non-profit organization focusing on international civil society cooperation, democracy promotion and youth exchange. Established in 1992, DRA has been actively involved in eastern Europe for many years, partnering up with independent NGOs and grassroots initiatives in many regions of the post-Soviet space.

Since the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the Russian Federation has continuously and systemically violated international law and human rights. Shelling and aerial bombing of civilian targets, using banned ammunition such as cluster bombs, assaults on evacuation convoys, medical institutions, and medical vehicles – the list of violations is long and growing. Occupation, captivity, arbitrary killings, systemic rape, torture, shelling, and bombing have killed and injured thousands and traumatized millions.

Moreover, it has caused heavy damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, administrative buildings, bridges, and private houses. 14 million people have been forced to flee their homes, with 8 million internally displaced persons and 6,7 million seeking refuge abroad.

The Ukrainian charitable organization, Vostok-SOS, and the German NGO DRA conducted a monitoring mission between May 3 and 12, 2022. An international team with members from Ukraine, Germany, France, and the Czech Republic including a member from the German/Swiss Human Rights Organisation Libereco Partnership for Human Rights monitored human rights violations, violations of international law, and consequent local humanitarian problems and needs in the Chernihiv, Kyiv, and Sumy regions. Russian armed forces withdrew from these regions in late March 2022, leaving a trail of death and destruction. Consequently, inhabitants and local authorities are facing challenges, including a dire humanitarian situation, the need to reconstruct thousands of homes and significant infrastructure, and recovery. The mission also monitored the situation with internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Zakarpattia region, where high numbers of IDPs are straining local capacities and infrastructure.

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