



NRC Ukraine Quarterly Newsletter: July 2025

Foreword by Marit Glad, NRC Country Director in Ukraine


As we launch this first edition of NRC Ukraine's quarterly newsletter, I am reminded of the profound uncertainty that continues to shape the humanitarian world, both globally and here in Ukraine. Across the world, fragility and volatility are increasing, while future international support wavers. In Ukraine, the consequences of a protracted conflict continue to weigh heavily on millions of civilians. In these uncertain times, our guiding principle remains clear: to keep those most affected by war firmly at the centre of our work. Civilians bear the brunt of violence, displacement, and hardship; their protection and dignity are paramount. Even as contexts shift rapidly around us, our commitment to upholding humanitarian principles and providing lasting support remains.

This past July, I had the honour to represent NRC at the Ukraine Recovery Conference held in Rome. The gathering was a crucial moment to reaffirm the international community's shared responsibility in supporting Ukraine's recovery. Yet, it is also clear that we must root recovery efforts in the reality lived daily by people in conflict-affected areas. This is a reality still marked by constant violence and insecurity. Recovery cannot be an abstract or distant goal; it must be about meeting immediate needs while building resilience and hope for the future. Governmental action and international support are vital, but they must be purposeful and inclusive, ensuring those most vulnerable and at risk of being left behind, such as displaced families, women and children, people with disabilities, are not overlooked. Recovery, in Ukraine's context, means rebuilding not only infrastructure but lives, communities, and opportunities.

In this edition, we bring you stories that reflect the efforts that NRC's teams have carried out in Ukraine over the past few months. Our main feature focuses on the crucial work of evacuations and protection of civilians in high-risk areas, showcasing the dedication of both our partners and the communities we serve. From our area offices, you will hear about our strategic exit from western Ukraine, and efforts to provide bomb shelters in Kherson city, alongside our continued response along the eastern frontlines. We also highlight collaborative work with local authorities and communities in northern Ukraine, demonstrating how partnerships strengthen resilience. Moreover, voices from the field will showcase NRC's commitment to education and protection from violence, areas fundamental to securing a better future for displaced children and families.

As we navigate the challenges ahead, NRC Ukraine remains steadfast in our mission: to stand with the most vulnerable, to adapt in response to evolving needs, and to advocate for a humanitarian approach centred on respect, protection, and empowerment. I thank all our partners, donors, colleagues, and communities for their unwavering support and trust. Together, we must continue to act with urgency and empathy, ensuring no one is left behind amid the enduring hardships of war.

Sincerely,
Marit Glad



Cover story

Maria and her husband Anatoliy were evacuated from Vovchansk district on May 12, 2024. She is sitting on her bed in Dokuchaivske Collective Center, outside of Kharkiv, in what used to be a student dormitory. Since May 2024, it is the new home for around 150 people evacuated from Vovchansk and Liptsy Hromada. Mostly elderly and people with disabilities. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

"I thought I would never leave my home" – Protecting civilians from conflict: stories and challenges of evacuations from the frontlines of Ukraine

Civilians along Ukraine's frontlines continue to face insecurity and violence as the conflict escalates. Increasing drone and missile attacks result in more and more civilian casualties, particularly in the areas closest to the fighting. People living in areas under constant threat are faced with impossible decisions on whether to stay in their homes or evacuate towards an uncertain future. Across the north, east and south of Ukraine the armed hostilities have dramatically increased throughout 2025. As civilians seek safety through evacuations, they also face growing challenges in restoring their normality. More information and support are needed to ensure that no one is left alone.

What is an evacuation? It is the few minutes that will change your life forever. Evacuations are always a loss, from which recovery can be incredibly challenging. It should come as no surprise that people are willing to postpone the decision to evacuate, to leave their home, even as danger comes incredibly close.

Who would ever think that they will have to leave their home, maybe forever? When is the right moment to do that? Is it when the frontline is a few kilometres from your village? Perhaps the fighting is moving slowly and somehow it won't reach you. What if the mobile networks go down because of the fighting? You might still have your safe space, enough food and other essentials stored, but can you talk to your loved ones? What if you see a tank firing a few hundred metres away from you, on your street? What if you cannot afford to leave? What if you do not know how to get out safely, and what will happen after you have been evacuated? What if you do not have the resources to rebuild a new home away from the only one you have ever known? What if...

People face many unknowns when making decisions that will forever impact their lives. Across Ukraine, NRC is working with its partners to ensure that civilians are well informed and fully supported before, during and after being evacuated.

These are some of the stories of the people we work with:

Olena



*Olena is a 53-year-old kinder garden teacher. She had to evacuate from Studenok, in Esman Hromada, Northern Ukraine.
Photo: Joachim Giaminardi/NRC*

Olena, a 53-year-old kinder garden teacher, waited four days before deciding to leave. Her village Studenok, in Esman Hromada, in Northern Ukraine, lies close to the border with Russian Federation. When the hostilities intensified here in early 2025, she was living with her brother, while her children, already grown up, had moved elsewhere.

“The local market and most of the infrastructure in the village were damaged or destroyed at that point,” she recalls. “One person was coming to distribute food, but they stopped when the attacks increased. Some men were bringing in supplies after that, but only when the mobile connection was working.”

“It became incredibly dangerous to leave the house because of the drones and the violence,

not even to get food. One day, I looked out of the window and saw a Russian tank firing from a few hundred metres away. Luckily, I had started making bread at home about three years ago, this helped me when I couldn’t go leave the house to buy supplies.”

Even as the fighting was coming closer and closer, Olena remained in her home. “We still had a mobile connection, so I could talk to my family and children”, she reflects. “When the connection stopped working, I knew it was time to leave.”

Still, the days were passing as she decided whether to leave or not, and in April, her brother was fatally wounded and died.

“The day we finally evacuated, in the village there were drones flying everywhere. I was taken by soldiers while explosions happened all around us. I remember that some soldiers and civilians were killed that day. Only after I left, the body of my brother was delivered to me.”

What was she able to bring with her?

With just a couple of minutes to leave her home, Olena was only able to pack a small number of things. **She took her insulin, a family photo album, and her personal documents.** The clothes and belongings that she now has, were provided or bought in Hlukhiv, where she was evacuated by the Esman administration.

Viktor

When Viktor is asked what he took with him, he points to his hat. The fighting had come so close that to evacuate his only option was to walk out of his house, so he did. He walked for approximately seven kilometres until, eventually, someone picked him up.

Viktor is elderly and had been living in a border settlement in the Sumy region. He was there alone as his wife had already left, and both of his sons had been conscripted into the Ukrainian armed forces.

“I stayed because I thought I would never leave my home”, he reflects. But the frontline came dangerously close to his house in first half of 2025. “I understood I had to go when the house had no more electricity, all the windows were blown out, and the building itself was partially damaged,” he says.

On 12 May he decided to leave. “The Russian military was very close at that point, so it was too dangerous for anyone to come and help me. I just left and walked for 7 km until someone passing by picked me up.”

Viktor was not able to bring much from his home. **“I could only bring what I had on me, my clothes, my personal documents and this hat.”** He doesn’t know what has happened to his house since he left, but he believes that it has since been destroyed.

Rimma and Tamara



Tamara and Rimma, friends who met in Kharkiv after the evacuation from their homes, May 2025. Photo: Olena Tkachenko/NRC

Rimma, her husband Volodymyr, their 15-year-old son Ivan, and their seven cats, were evacuated from Konstantinivka, in Donetsk oblast, in December 2024. Their dog could not come. Fortunately, they were reunited with it after a few weeks, thanks to the work of volunteers taking care of pets left behind in dangerous areas. After being evacuated, the family arrived in the Zernove shelter, one of the many sites that hosts evacuees in and around the city of Kharkiv.

The family lived all their life in Konstantinivka, which is now just 10 kilometers from the active frontline.

Tamara, 66 years old, had a similar experience. An internally displaced person (IDP) from Dvurechnaya, Kharkivska oblast, her village remains under occupation as of July 2025. She evacuated with her disabled husband, Serhii, and their two dogs.

Rimma recalls the moment when they decided to evacuate. “There was no income. My job as a vendor collapsed, businesses disappeared one by one. Pharmacies and stores were closed. My husband lost his work and started driving a taxi just to survive. **We ran out of everything – there was not even salt at our home. So, we began looking for a way out.**”

“We were reluctant to leave, as we had many goats and ducks. We left on December 17th, 2024. I came back two weeks later because I couldn’t just abandon all my animals.”

The two, Rimma and Tamara, met in a shelter in Zernove and became friends.

Snapshot of an evacuation – Shostka raion

Communities close to the border in Shostka raion, northern Sumy oblast, continue to be severely impacted by shelling and aerial attacks, which have massively increased throughout 2025. Shahlynska is a community located within 7 km of the border with the Russian Federation. As of April 2025, large scale evacuation efforts had intensified in this area. Prior to 2022, approximately 4,200 people were still living in the community’s 11 settlements. Currently, only 310 residents remain.

The geographic position of Shahlynska creates complex logistical challenges. The community is surrounded by rivers on three sides, with three bridges providing access between the area and the rest of the region. Two of these bridges have been damaged since 2022, leaving a single remaining bridge as the only possible evacuation route. However, the last remaining bridge itself is in a perilous state, as the structure cannot support vehicles heavier than small cars and light vehicles. The heavier vehicles, such as buses, that are normally used to move larger groups of people and their belongings, cannot pass. Most recently, access to the area has become even more limited by the conflict as any new and unfamiliar vehicles are almost immediately targeted by the drones that are constantly flying in the air. Only residents and community leaders, using their personal transport, can reach the location. Civilians are reluctant to leave due their inability to evacuate with their belongings and livestock.

There is no electricity, mobile network, or internet access. All essential services, including healthcare facilities, are destroyed or non-existent. Local evacuation teams can only get as far as the closest military checkpoint, which means that residents have to get there through their own means.

Most of those who remain are elderly. Families with children were mandatorily evacuated in September 2024 and are now located in the nearby towns of Hlukhiv and Shostka. Evacuated civilians are currently being hosted in a collective centre in Hlukhiv and a transit centre in the city of Putyvl. Local authorities often provide critical housing support and help evacuees meet their primary needs, such as food, water and healthcare. However, **they have raised the urgent need for continued cash assistance, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.**

A very similar picture can be seen in the nearby Esman community, whose city council has also evacuated to Hlukhiv. Some residents are fleeing on foot under active drone attacks, without any

personal belongings or identification documents. **Local authorities are both actively supporting these evacuations and helping to provide for the immediate needs of those that are displaced, but more assistance is always needed.**

More support is needed

Both Olena and Viktor have found temporary safety and relief in Hlukhiv. However, both continue to face significant challenges both before and after their evacuation.

In 2024, Olena lost her job in the kinder garden, because of the bombings. “One day, an attack damaged the school and destroyed all of my diplomas. It wasn’t possible for children to be there after that, so I stopped working.” Already in 2024, Olena was offered to evacuate to the city of Shostka, but she was told that she would have to pay for it. If evacuated, she was then offered temporary accommodation in one of the schools in the city, where she would have to sleep on the floor of the gym due to the lack of facilities. Olena refused to evacuate as she was not able to afford it, and she felt that she would not be able to support herself once displaced.

Beyond temporary accommodation, evacuees often struggle to access long-term housing solutions. In Shostka, most of the options that are offered to IDPs are outside of the city, in rural and sometimes isolated areas. This can represent a noticeable economic and social barrier for evacuees, especially when moving with children. Remote housing solutions are isolating both when trying to find income-generating opportunities as well as in terms of accessing services and being integrated into the local community.

When Viktor arrived in Hlukhiv, he knew nothing of evacuations and how to navigate the process. He only knew that he wanted to reach his sister, who lived there. He first stayed at her home but was soon forced to spend time at the local hospital as his health deteriorated. After receiving treatment, he decided to move to a collective site, where we met him. He now receives an allowance for his disability. Unfortunately, the property title of his home was consumed by a fire before he left. Without proper documentation, it is difficult to obtain compensation from the state for the destroyed property. This would allow him to buy a new house elsewhere.

For Rimma, the evacuation also brought new struggles. She is still of working age, and as such she did not qualify for the state-provided IDP allowance, meaning she could not receive any financial support. Her family was provided with food and accommodation at the shelter, but that was temporary. Her eldest son, Nikita, who is 25 and lived in western Ukraine, supported them financially with what he had. Rimma had to find a job to be able to provide for the family.

“Once, we residents even argued over something as small as a donated T-shirt. I never imagined it would come to this,” recalls Rimma.

NRC supported Rimma with cash assistance. By April 2025, her family rented a small house in Kharkiv, and she had found work as a supermarket vendor.

Tamara found a place nearby Rimma's house. She also received cash assistance from NRC and, in April 2025, left the shelter with her husband Serhii. As pensioners, they receive government payments for IDPs, but "it's barely enough to survive," Tamara admits.

"I buy what I can for him and myself... It's embarrassing, but I rely on free charity meals sometimes," says Tamara. Before the war, Tamara worked as an agronomist and spent years as a photojournalist for the local newspaper.

Now, she and Rimma lean on each other. "We meet often," Tamara says. "In times like these, we have to stick together."

NRC's work

The struggles that displaced people face after reaching safety are a reminder that **responsibility for the protection and wellbeing of IDPs does not finish once the evacuation has happened**. Ensuring that civilians have access to assistance and services, such as housing, healthcare, psychosocial and integration support, education and livelihoods, is critical to ensure that they are not further forced into impossible choices, such as moving back to unsafe areas, or not evacuating at all.

NRC is working closely with local communities, authorities and civil society organisations, to ensure that people are safe and supported throughout an evacuation. NRC works to strengthen the technical capacity and operational ability of partners conducting evacuations, so that they can continue this crucial work in a safe and inclusive way.

NRC's approach focuses on three phases: the pre-evacuation phase; the evacuation and relocation phase; and thirdly, the post-evacuation phase. The first, before the evacuation, is reaching out to places and people in need of support, providing information on evacuation options. The second focuses on the physical evacuation itself. The third, following the evacuation, is centred on follow-up assistance, which can include psychosocial support, referrals to key services, help with finding sustainable housing, cash assistance and cash for protection support, if severe risks still exist.



Anatoliy was evacuated with his wife Maria from a small village on the outskirts of Vovchansk in May 2024. They now live in a former student dormitory in Kharkiv alongside other elderly people from the same area. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

Post-evacuation support remains a critical and often overlooked part of the evacuation cycle, without which there is a risk of creating a system where people are relocated but cannot re-integrate locally and are therefore forced to make the **impossible decision** of staying in place with limited means or moving back to unsafe areas.

Stories like Olena's and Viktor's, Rimma's and Tamara's, highlight how the most vulnerable often fall through the cracks in the evacuation cycle, as local authorities and humanitarian responders, despite significant efforts, are unable to protect civilians in the frontlines. Examples from communities such as Shahlynska and Esmanska, where people are left with few or no options to evacuate, serve as a stark reminder about the impossible choices that civilians and responders are faced with daily.

At the same time, the exceptional work being done by local authorities such as the Esman, Shalyhyne, and Hlukhiv city councils, and national and local humanitarian organisations, with the support of NRC, shows that there are ways to ensure that civilians can be evacuated safely and receive protection, assistance and services once displaced.

What is going on in the field?

Final Steps and Lasting Impact in Western Ukraine

As NRC closed its doors in western Ukraine at the end of June 2025, the team reflected on a legacy of meaningful support to communities across the region. In its final months, the office focused on a responsible exit, ensuring that activities continued through both direct implementation and strong partnerships. Achievements included the rehabilitation of social housing in Rivne Oblast, the installation of a solar power plant at Oriana School in Lviv, and operational support to collective sites. Youth engagement, job fairs, and a range of livelihoods, food, and shelter initiatives have contributed to making a lasting difference. The team also strengthened legal assistance, supporting the paralegal network and advancing the rehabilitation of schools, community centres,

Safe Havens in Kherson: Shelter and Hope Amidst Uncertainty

In Kherson and surrounding areas, NRC has prioritised safety and dignity for residents living under the constant threat of conflict. Working closely with authorities, the team is working to equip bomb shelters in the frontline city, providing 1290 bomb-shelter kits and 86 generators. Each kit includes essentials such as a folded bed, bedlinen, pillow, and power bank, helping thousands endure periods of heightened risk.

Recognising the urgent need for safe accommodation, NRC has supported the opening of a modular town in Chaykine in June. This innovative site, made up of 20 container homes and communal facilities, offers shelter and stability to families displaced by destruction

and the installation of solar power in hospitals, with the support of the German Federal Government and KFW.

NRC's work in western Ukraine culminated in the official opening of the KFW-funded “Centre for Registration and Night Stay of Homeless People” in Lviv. The event, attended by the German embassy and KFW representatives, and the Deputy Mayor of Lviv, and NRC senior management, was a moment to celebrate our enduring impact and the partnerships that will continue to support vulnerable people in the region. NRC extends its heartfelt thanks to all partners, staff, and communities who have been part of this journey since 2022.

Responding along the Frontlines: Support and Resilience in the East

In eastern Ukraine, NRC has continued to support communities affected by the conflict. As drone and shelling attacks intensified in cities such as Kharkiv, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk, teams responded swiftly, providing rapid multi-purpose cash assistance to help families meet urgent needs with dignity. Legal information and counselling were delivered both directly and through local partners, while collaborations with NGOs supported the safe evacuation of residents from frontline areas.

Education has been a central focus. NRC improved learning spaces in shelters across Dnipropetrovska, Donetsk, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts, rehabilitating five schools and awarding grants to 25 more. Over 280 teachers received specialist training to foster safe, protective environments for children, and remedial education activities were launched with four partners to help students recover lost learning.

along the Dnipro River. NRC ensured that each container is fully furnished, supporting up to six family members, while other humanitarian organisations provided vital infrastructure like latrines and water purification.

Among the first residents were Olga and her husband, who fled Tokarivka after their home was damaged by shelling. After months of uncertainty, they found comfort in Chaykine, close to their native village. “We are very grateful for the opportunity to live close to our home village and stay in our community, and our cats can live with us too!” Olga shared. As the modular town grows, NRC continues to expand support, including basic livelihood activities and improved communal spaces.

Strengthening Communities: Recovery and Protection in the North

In northern Ukraine, NRC has continued to deliver critical support to communities facing ongoing risks near the frontlines. In June, the team provided computer equipment, charging stations, and power banks to the Hlukhiv municipality in Sumy oblast, helping to maintain access to vital legal and administrative services despite unreliable electricity and connectivity.

Capacity-building remains central to NRC’s work, with a training session held for Free Legal Aid representatives and community-based paralegals from Chernihiv oblast. By bringing together state and non-state actors, the event reinforced a network of professionals ready to meet the evolving legal needs of displaced people in northern Ukraine.

The ICLA team also completed ten due diligence assessments for infrastructure recovery projects in Kyiv and Chernihiv oblasts, as part of efforts to ensure that those receiving shelter assistance

NRC's legal support expanded through new partnerships, such as with the Chuhuiv Human Rights Group, enabling broader assistance on housing, land, and property issues. Workshops for commissions in the Kharkiv region focused on legal challenges around the compensation for damaged or destroyed properties. NRC also continued to address financial barriers to justice by covering legal fees and worked to strengthen digital infrastructure for local stakeholders, with the support of Norway and the German Federal Government.

have all necessary legal ownership documents for the properties in question. Meanwhile, the Shelter team advanced its cash-for-repairs programme in Shostka district, with 22 households already repaired and more underway, aiming for completion by the end of August.

Looking ahead, the Shelter cluster has identified priority locations for the 2025–2026 winterisation campaign in Chernihiv region, ensuring timely planning for the coming cold season. In partnership with the Department of Education, NRC is also restoring sanitary facilities at Lyceum No. 16 in Chernihiv, creating a safer and healthier environment for students and teachers.

Stories from the field

Bringing Calm and Confidence to Classrooms in Conflict-Affected Areas

Story by the NRC Education Team

In March and April 2025, NRC conducted the Better Learning Program (BLP) Level 1 training for 75 teachers across five conflict-affected schools in Kharkivska oblast. Beyond professional development, this initiative is critical to bring **calmness, confidence, and healing into classrooms that have been burdened by the stress of war**.

Throughout the training, a powerful insight became clear: teachers felt supported, motivated, and, perhaps most importantly, empowered. Many spoke of a renewed sense of ease, as if they could finally take a full breath, both physically and emotionally.

“The breathing exercises were a revelation,” one teacher noted. The training environment, described as warm, respectful, and inclusive, allowed teachers to feel heard and valued, often for the first time in many months. “I was able to see myself differently,” another participant reflected. **“I left not just with tools for the classroom, but with more confidence in myself.”**

But the impact didn't stop with the teachers. During the same period, these teachers began implementing BLP sessions in their classrooms, reaching over 758 students. These sessions became more than just scheduled activities. **For many students, BLP offered a moment in the week to**

to pause, reflect, and feel safe amidst the ongoing stress and uncertainty of conflict. Teachers observed significant emotional and behavioral changes. Children began looking forward to sessions, gradually opening up through breathing exercises, light stretching, drawing, and group sharing. One teacher recalled a student saying after a breathing exercise, **“I felt like my thoughts stopped racing.”** These simple, consistent practices helped students relax, express emotions, and build trust with peers.



Teachers and NRC staff members posing for a group photo after the BLP training, Hotel Lisovyy in Natalyne village, Berestynskyy raion, Kharkivska Oblast, March 2025. Photo by: NRC.

“After this training, I know how to stay calm even in the most stressful moments. This experience gave me strength, and I’m already using it to support my students. Thank you, NRC, for helping me help them.”

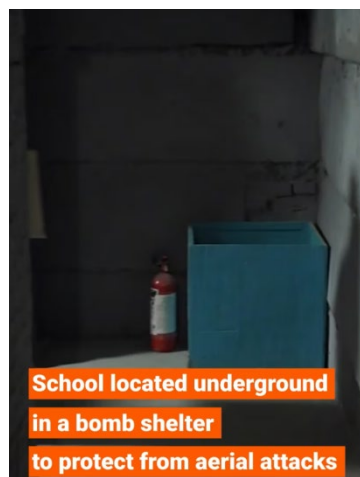
A teacher participating in the training

Some students initially struggled to name or understand their feelings. Over time, however, many developed greater emotional awareness and regulation. **“At first, they didn’t know what ‘feeling safe’ meant,”** one facilitator said. **“Now they can describe it and even help each other find it.”**

By the end of the sessions, visible signs of transformation appeared: students became more focused, less anxious, and more eager to participate. In some schools, students began asking when the next session would be. For them, the program became more than a lesson.

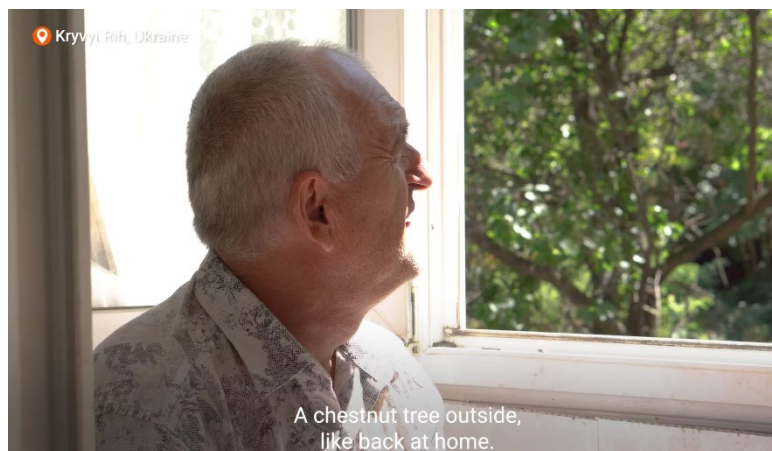
This shared journey of growth documented through regular teacher communication and post-workshop surveys shows **the power of creating safe, structured spaces where both teachers and students can breathe, grow, and rebuild their resilience.**

Learn more about our rehabilitation of schools and adaptation of bomb shelters for classrooms



**School located underground
in a bomb shelter
to protect from aerial attacks**

The story of Volodymyr and his mother, evacuated from Toretsk to Kryvii Rih



Facts and Figures from NRC Ukraine in 2025

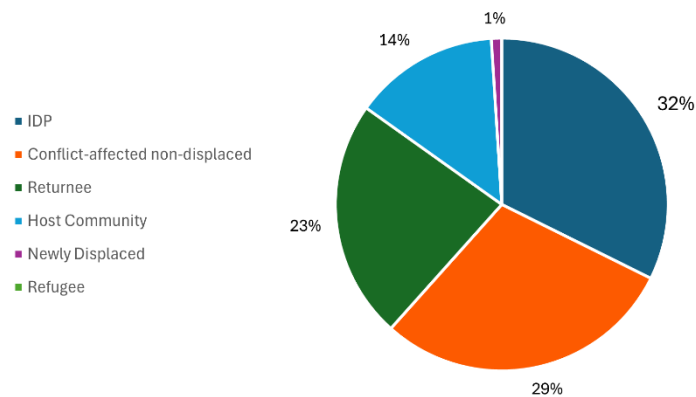
How many people has NRC Ukraine reached with humanitarian assistance so far this year?

More than **82,000** people received NRC's assistance between January and June 2025.

Number of Project Participants between January and June 2025



Displacement Status



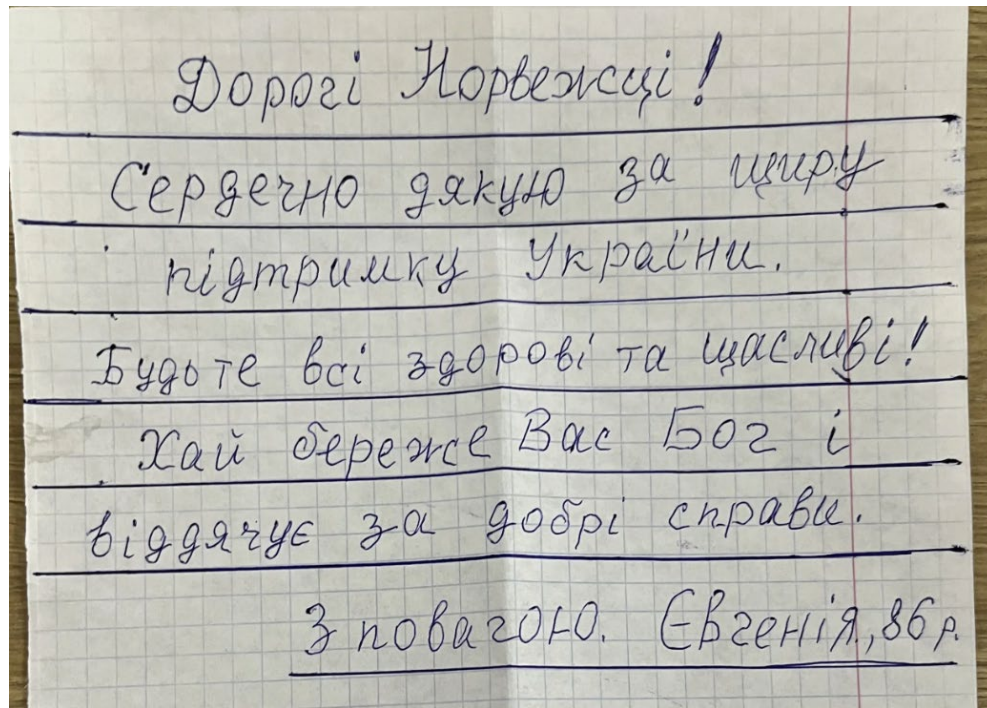
Almost **16,000,000** USD of **cash assistance** have been distributed since January 2025, the majority of which to frontline areas.

NRC works to ensure that its cash assistance is **safe, accessible, accountable** and **participatory**.

Percent of beneficiaries reporting that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, and participatory manner

69.11%

Cash provided by NRC in 2025 has been used to directly address primary needs such as **food** and **healthcare**. It has also been frequently used to support **income generating** activities.



Dear Norwegians,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your heartfelt support of Ukraine!

Stay well and be happy!

May God protect you and award you for all the good you do!

With deep respect,

Yevheniia, 86

You are NRC's Ambassador!

Share the stories of those we support. Together, let's ensure their voices are heard and their experiences recognised.

Recent stories, articles and reports by NRC Ukraine (click to open)

Ukraine three years on: Sharp increase in basic needs along the frontline

Returning to the frontline: A photo essay by Ingebjørg Kårstad

Frost and floods: the challenges of daily life near the Ukrainian frontline

Youth needs assessment in Ukraine

Ukraine's recovery risks leaving millions behind, warn humanitarian agencies

Bridging the Gaps: Ensuring a Human-Centred Recovery for Internally Displaced People in Ukraine

Supported by



With the
participation of



**MINISTÈRE
DE L'EUROPE
ET DES AFFAIRES
ÉTRANGÈRES**

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*