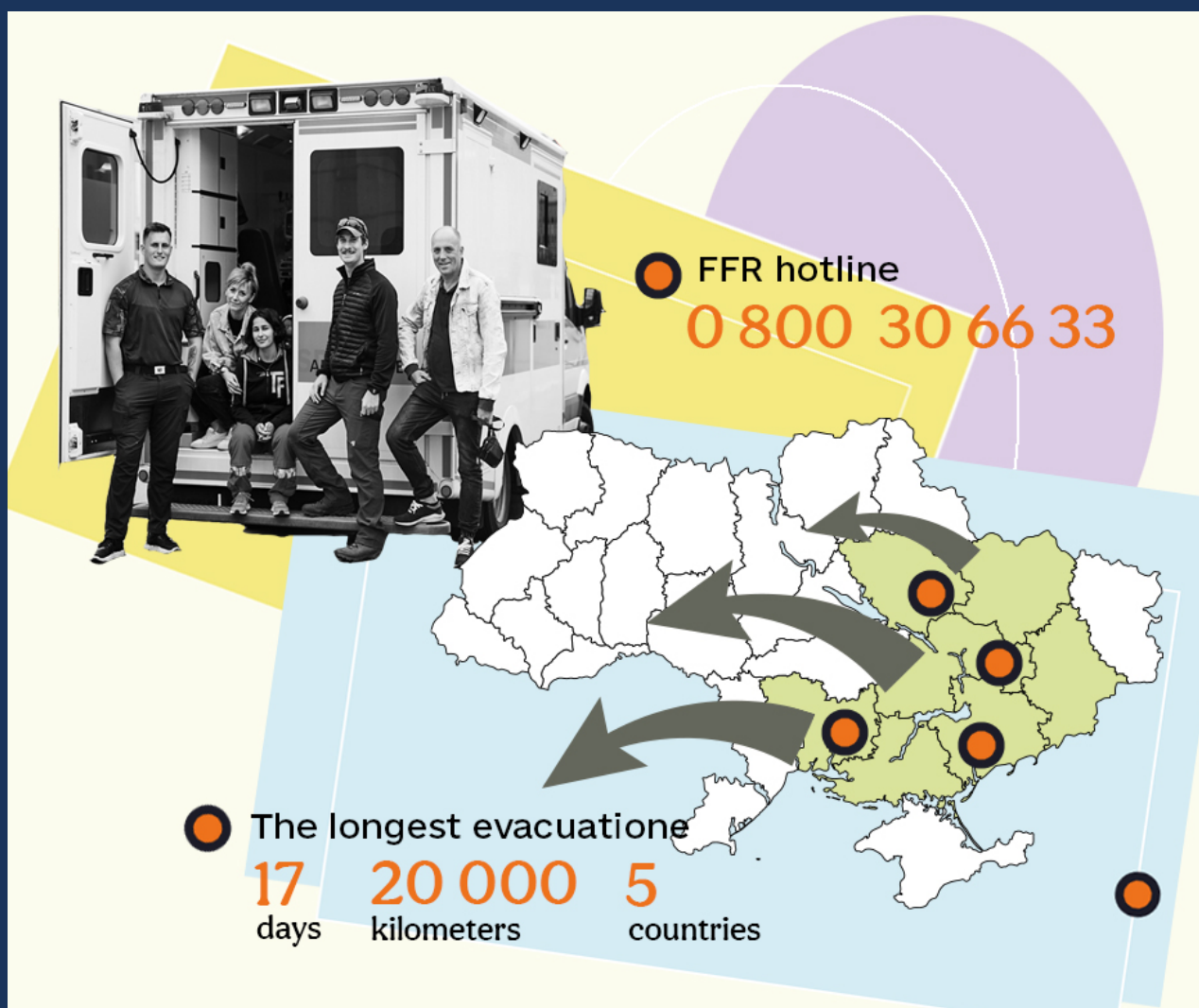


24.02: EVACUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Road map



The report was prepared within the framework of the project “Human Rights for Ukraine”, implemented by the UN Development Program in Ukraine and financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark during 2019-2023.

The report uses interviews with the experts. The opinions, conclusions, or recommendations are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations Development Program, or other UN agencies.

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Collage by Valeriia Mezentseva.

Description: picture of an ambulance and three men are staying and two women sitting near to it used in collage. Silhouette of Ukraine with the arrows on it symbolizing evacuation directions from East to West of Ukraine. Signs o collage: “FFR hotline 0 800 30 66 33”, and “The longest evacuation: 17 days, 20000 km, 5 countries.

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“We were among the first to create an emergency response that comes specifically from the community of people with disabilities. That is, not from the position of the objects of assistance, but from the position of the subjects of law”.

Yuliia Sachuk, the Head of the Fight for Right Public Organization of people with disabilities.

The study titled “24.02: Evacuation of people with disabilities” was conducted by the Public Organization **Fight For Right** together with the United Nations Development Program in Ukraine.

The results are based on **20 expert interviews**, which were collected from June to August 2022.

The respondents are activists, volunteers, and representatives of governmental and international organizations who took part in the evacuation of people with disabilities after February 24, 2022.

Ukraine already faced the challenge of evacuating people with disabilities **2014–2015** during the occupation of Crimea and part of the Eastern territories. **This study, however, shows that the state did not learn its previous lessons** and did not do enough to improve the procedures and legal regulation of evacuation measures, nor provided clear and accessible communication with people under martial law.

“...Does the Ministry of Social Policy know how many of their social workers have left? It could, for example, give open information and say something like: ‘Friends, we have an x number of people with disabilities left without care. If someone wants to help them, here are their addresses, here are their phone numbers... Strictly speaking, it should have been prepared for this... this constitutes a significant delay, and it made our work very difficult later... They should have given at least some guidelines on how to help these people: who needs help, where these people are, what they need”.

Liudmyla Yankina, Human Rights Activist and Volunteer engaged in the protection of public activists, Project Manager in the human rights organization ZMINA, Kyiv.

One of the key features of the evacuation in 2022 is the participation of people with disabilities themselves in the process of organizing evacuation, the logistics of humanitarian aid delivery, establishing contacts, laying out routes, searching for accessible shelter, providing medicines and assistive technologies, etc.

The study analyzed, **what should be taken into account during the evacuation of people with disabilities and their adaptation at the destination:**

- accessibility of information,
- availability of communication methods,
- transport accessibility,
- availability of assistive devices,
- medical support,
- social support,
- comprehensive approach.

The study also analyzed **the state of the regulatory framework regarding the evacuation of people with disabilities** and the reformatting of the organizations’ activities to help them.

As such, **many organizations have clearly assigned roles internally in terms of areas of activity.** For example, the search for transport and partners abroad, settlement, and the reception of evacuees.

Over time, these organizations **have developed algorithms and instructions for each area of activity.** For example, document flow rules and border crossing procedures for people with disabilities, as well as their guardians and accompanying staff.

“The city and even the state, I will go this far in saying, were absolutely not ready for the evacuation of people with reduced mobility, and in general – of any unprotected category. All this was taken up... by local activists and the public”.

Yurii Ponkin, the Head of the Public Organization “Movement without Borders”, which was created by persons with and without disabilities, on an equal rights basis, Kryvyi Rih.

The interviewed experts had **different experiences of cooperating with state bodies – from its complete absence to very close cooperation,** which went beyond formal powers.

Some of the public organizations did not manage to establish cooperation at the city level, but were more successful with central authorities or individual officials from specific institutions (Office of the President, State Emergency Service, Ukrainian Railways, and others).

At the local government level, there was a lack of coordinated communication with public organizations that could have provided constructive feedback and influenced how the evacuations and assistance were organized or developed inclusive approaches to the local policies.

The winter-spring period of 2022 demonstrated that **state leaders and lawmakers did not have a habit of aligning their actions with human rights standards** and evaluating proposed legislative

changes for their potential impact on people's ability to exercise their rights.

A few examples of such a **non-inclusive approach include**: changing the rules for crossing the state border, different law enforcement practices regarding the documents that allow men aged 18-60 to cross the border, and lack of clarification on how documents should be issued for relatives accompanying people with disabilities.



“When we started to evacuate, many people did not have their documents issued, and our evacuation buses were turned back. Border guards did not allow men with visual disorders to cross the border, not even on foot, only children and women were allowed, and no escorts, not even family members. Those accompanying, people with visual disorders, or people in wheelchairs could not cross the border”.

Valentyna Butenko, the Director of the “Right to Choose” rehabilitation center for young people with disabilities and their family members, Kharkiv.

Urgency and total unpreparedness often forced representatives of the authorities and public organizations to make **choices in favor of saving lives, sacrificing decent conditions** (insufficient number or absence of accessible transport and housing, assistive technologies, information and communication, social or medical support, etc.).

Collage by Valeriia Mezentseva.

Description: pictures of different elder people during evacuation are used. Silhouette of border guardian staying next to “Stop Control” sign is placed in the bottom of collage.

It was also **difficult to create decent conditions for living and rehabilitation** when settling evacuated people with disabilities on the territory of Ukraine.

Instead, the public sector and volunteers sought to **adhere to the principle of “nothing for us without us”**, because it allows people to:

- feel their **subjectivity**, make independent decisions, and influence evacuation measures,
- receive and provide assistance more **efficiently**,
- feel **belonging to the community**, which is important to take care of themselves.

The public sector was left to its own devices to develop interaction algorithms to do its work as efficiently and effectively as possible using limited resources.

The **experience and strategies described in the study should become an important basis for the development of a systemic state policy**, especially in the context of comprehensive support during evacuation and the involvement of people with disabilities in the development and implementation of such measures.



Collage by Dmytro Zhuravel.

Description: pictures of different people during evacuation are used in collage: girls on wheelchairs, men with have bags mother with a small child, an elderly woman lying on a stretcher and being lifted into an ambulance.

The strategy of solving the issues of organizing the evacuation of people with disabilities by the state

Challenge	Finding solutions
<p>Lack of adequate and timely information from the authorities about the necessity of evacuation and existing hazards.</p>	<p>Within the regulatory documents, prescribe a protocol of actions during an evacuation, taking into account the factors of a person's consent or non-consent to evacuation (currently, the refusal form is designed only for mandatory evacuation, which does not apply to people with disabilities and people who are in places of deprivation of liberty), determine the levels of hazard and the measures they call for in order to avoid putting rescue personnel at risk and to regulate the responsibilities of caregivers.</p>
<p>Lack of protocols and consistent coordination between all government agencies that could provide accessible transportation.</p> <p>Lack of communication with public initiatives regarding existing registers of people with disabilities to contact and identify needs in advance.</p> <p>Limited resources and capabilities of local authorities,</p>	<p>Develop annexes to regulatory documents stating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> typical action plans for the evacuation of people with disabilities and provide budgets for this; criteria for levels of danger and the actions they call for; action plans for local authorities for the provision of comprehensive assistance

which at critical moments are left without support at the central level.

(affordable housing, rehabilitation services and support).

Implement international practices for evacuating people with disabilities and **develop Ukrainian standards** for real needs and challenges in accordance with them.

Lack of open and updated official information on the number of closed institutions, the people in them, and their safety and needs.

Designate a single responsible institution from the government that will disseminate information in an accessible format regarding evacuation in general and people with disabilities in particular.

Sustainability of social support and lack of access to the registers of people with disabilities. Some of the social workers who accompanied people with disabilities were evacuated, which led to the lack of special care and the helplessness of people with disabilities.

Maintain registers of people with disabilities and **establish communication** with public organizations to determine the needs they can take on during evacuation.

Availability of information. Current information from the authorities on evacuation and actions during air alerts was not provided for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, or visual and hearing disabilities.

Implement standards of information accessibility for people with various types of disabilities.

<p>Availability of transport. Impossibility of using the subway as a shelter due to its inaccessibility for people with various types of disabilities; the need for volunteers to carry people in their arms to transport, boarding and disembarking to/from train cars; lack of accessible buses for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>Implement transport accessibility standards.</p>
<p>Housing according to individual needs and accessible infrastructure, in particular, shelters that people with disabilities can reach independently.</p> <p>For people with rare diseases who require persistent access to medication and possibly hospitalization, the proximity of a medical facility to housing is important. People with psychosocial disabilities require housing that takes into account the need for separate spaces.</p>	<p>Develop strategies for evacuating people with disabilities to shelters.</p> <p>Maintain the all-Ukrainian register of accessible housing and build new infrastructure that is accessible to people with disabilities and other groups of the population with reduced mobility.</p>
<p>Provision of medicines. The burden of providing medicines to people with disabilities and others who need them (with cancer, asthma, epilepsy, rare diseases) fell on public initiatives and organizations.</p>	<p>Implement state medical programs to provide drugs, and simplify procedures for purchasing and importing certain drugs.</p>

Prevention of financial problems / financial safety cushion / transparent financial reporting. At the beginning of the war, many public organizations faced the fact that it was not possible to pay from a legal account or with a card of a private person; there have been more frequent cases when rather high payments have been demanded for humanitarian aid delivery services.

Provide a budget for basic humanitarian assistance and the needs of people with disabilities, in particular, to provide assistive technologies, rehabilitation facilities, specialized accompanying, and medical assistance.

Organization of logistics. Blocked bridges and other connections, curfews, etc., made it very difficult to organize evacuation and provide other assistance.

People who were involved in evacuation measures (for example, drivers, medical personnel, and assistants) **were in the area of constant risk.**

The exhausting journey took several days, because of the need to wait out shelling, pass checkpoints, and stop for rest, especially in cases of families with children and people with disabilities.

Develop a separate policy and legal framework for the provision of logistics and fuel for initiatives and organizations engaged in the evacuation and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

View evacuation routes; if it is safer to work at night or at dawn, evacuate during this period of time; **organize temporary rest points for** drivers and evacuees, etc.

Prevention of emotional burnout. Exhausting and almost non-stop evacuation work (people worked non-stop for many days in a row, without sleep), leading to psychological stress, when people require emotional and psychological support along with practical help. In addition to that, human resources are sometimes lost, as little or no funds **are allocated to support volunteers**, although the need for them remains.

Provide programs for the prevention of emotional burnout and support for volunteers and activists. Involve international institutions in this.

FIGHT FOR RIGHT is a Ukrainian public organization of people with disabilities, founded in 2017. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, it has turned into a system of comprehensive assistance to Ukrainian men and women with disabilities during the war.

During February-August 2022, Fight For Right provided assistance to 5,041 people with disabilities who urgently needed it; among them 1,045 people were evacuated to a safe place abroad or to other places in Ukraine.

The geography of evacuations is diverse: from Donetsk region (the largest number of requests), followed by Kharkiv region, then Zaporizhzhia, and currently, many requests are coming from Dnipropetrovsk region (south, the bank of the Kakhovka Reservoir).

The longest evacuation carried out by Fight For Right started in Mykolaiv and ended in Buenos Aires. This path led through 5 countries, 7 cities, 4 trains, 1 plane, 1 bus, and 3 refugee centers. It lasted 17 days and covered more than 20,000 kilometers.

The oldest woman medically evacuated by FFR is 98 years old, and the youngest is 3 years old.

35 people from 9 countries have joined the Fight For Right team. The joint effort raised a GoFundMe of €480,000 to save people with disabilities, with the majority of donations coming from people with disabilities around the world.



Collage by Dmytro Zhuravel.

Description: pictures of different elder people during evacuation are used. A person on a stretcher is being lifted into a train car by a team of attendants, a woman in a wheelchair is being lifted to the car by a lift, a group of people with bags near a minibus, three men from a team of attendants at the railway station.

Road map

for state authorities, united territorial communities, the Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the Commissioner for Accessibility, public organizations, volunteer initiatives, and all those who rescue people with disabilities and other groups with reduced mobility

About the Fight For Right's activities

[Learn more](#)

Contact for support: info@ffr.org.ua

Support the evacuation of people with disabilities financially

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