

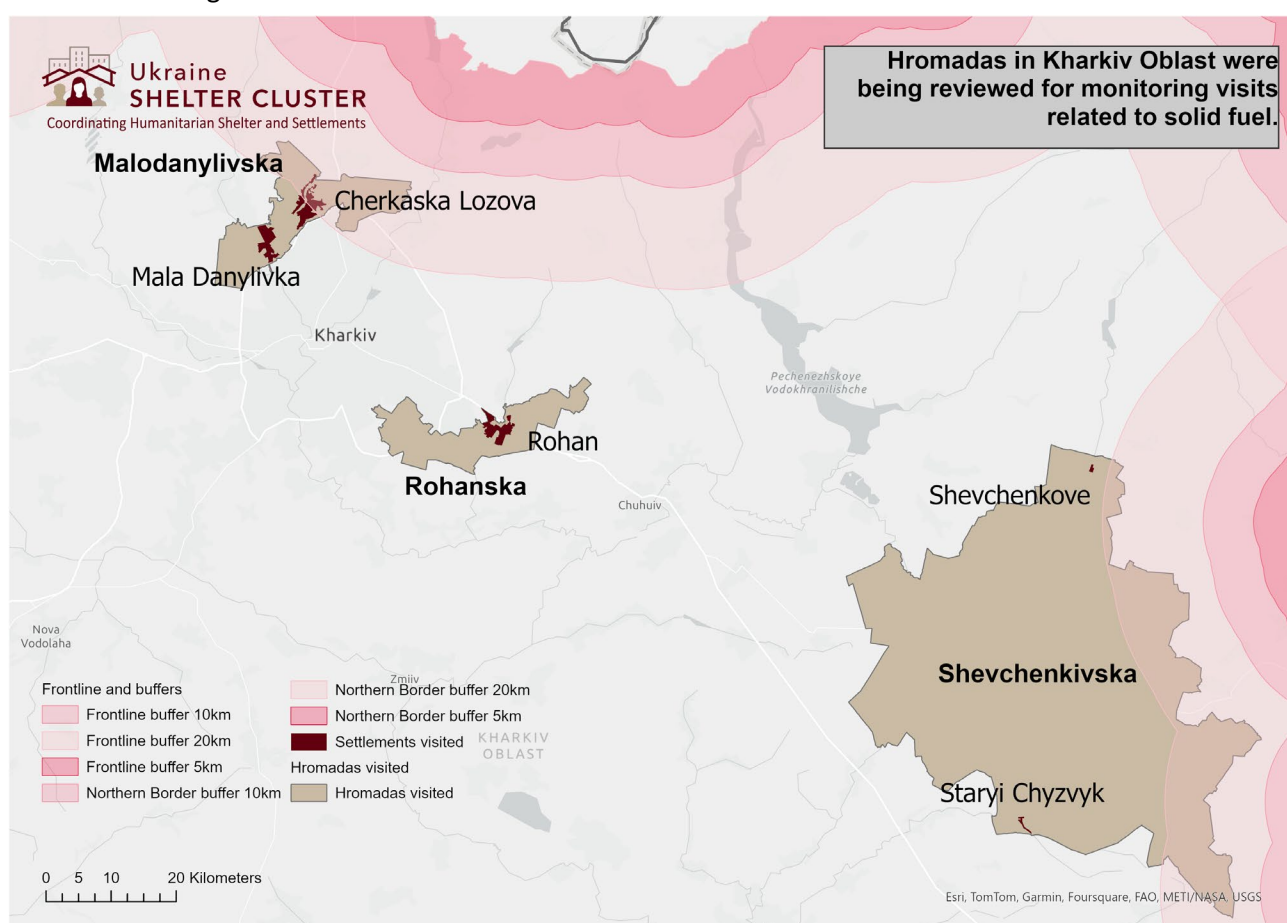
MONITORING MISSION REPORT

Winterization: Solid Fuel Assistance

At the end of January, the East Hub team of the Shelter Cluster conducted monitoring missions in Kharkivska Oblast in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv (UNICEF's implementing partner), UNHCR, Kharkiv City Boxing Club (KCBC) and I Am Saved, with the participation of Triangle Generation Humanitaire (TGH) and Ukrainian Humanitarian Fund (UHF).

These missions aimed to establish connections with local authorities, develop mechanisms for timely updates on needs and coordinate the implementation of solid fuel assistance in both monetary and in-kind forms. Additionally, they sought to introduce local administrations to existing Cluster coordination tools, monitor ongoing and completed partner projects, identify potential gaps, and document best practices.

The Shelter Cluster team extends its gratitude to all participating organizations for their valuable contributions to the monitoring mission.



Map of the visited settlements and Hromadas

The mission visited nine households that received cash assistance for heating during the 2024-2025 winter period and eight households that received in-kind assistance, including chopped firewood, logs and briquettes.



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	Mission details		
Date of visit:	January 27, 2025	January 28, 2025	January 29, 2025
Locations:	Shevchenkivska hromada, Kupianskyi raion	Malodanylivska hromada, Kharkivskyi raion	Roganska hromada, Kharkivskyi raion
Participants:	• Deputy Head of Shevchenkivska hromada • Head of Social department • SNFI Cluster team • NRC team.	• Head of Malodanylivska hromada • SNFI Cluster team • UNHCR team • Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv team.	• Head of Rohanska hromada • Head of External relations department • SNFI Cluster team • UNHCR team • UHF representative • TGH team • KCBC team • I Am Saved.

Context

Shevchenkivska hromada. As of 01.01.2024, the total population of the hromada was 11,011 individuals (5585 households), of which 997 individuals (495 households) were IDPs. 10,499 individuals are vulnerable. Compared to 2022, the population of the hromada decreased by 1911 individuals. Many people returned to the hromada due to the inability to find employment and financially support themselves in their places of displacement. A support center in Kharkiv¹ provides UAH 10,800² in assistance to displaced Kupiansk residents, while those remaining within Kupiansk itself have not received assistance.³

Given the community's proximity to active hostilities, a worsening security situation could lead to a significant population decrease and the relocation of IDPs to safer areas further from the front line. No collective centers exist in the hromada, due to the absence of adequate bomb shelters in available buildings.

¹ Humanitarian hub

² The standard amount of MPC assistance

³ According to the local authorities



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The deterioration of the situation in Kupiansk is a priority concern for the hromada authorities. Those on the left bank of the Oskil river are lacking electricity, gas, and water, while the right bank has electricity and gas but no water. Water is delivered in barrels. In case of shelling, the hromada receives assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which provides materials for the hromada's stock for emergency response and sealing the building envelope. Additionally, Proliska provides ESK in the hromada. It was discussed that there are only two municipal brigades present in the hromada to carry out repairs. The population can apply for E-recovery assistance. However; 5 households in the hromada were denied, because of lack of adequate property documents. The Head of social department reported that if there is damage to houses, they are more likely to turn to humanitarian organizations. She listed such organizations as Solidarités Internationales (SI), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Due to the current security context and the approaching frontline, organizations cannot carry out humanitarian repairs in locations where they are needed.

During winter, households rely on firewood and coal for heating, however, the hromada's representatives believe that financial assistance for the purchase of solid fuel is the most successful modality due to logistical challenges, storage issues, and a lack of drivers. Three solid fuel suppliers operate in the district. Fund usage is monitored by social services and local authorities, with beneficiaries required to provide purchase reports and photos.

The population has the opportunity to receive subsidies from the state, but, according to hromada representatives, there is currently a large number of refusals due to outstanding utility bills. This is further compounded by a lack of employment for those who apply. In order to alleviate this situation, the hromada reported they submit such people for registration for assistance from ACTED (MPCA). However, due to the organization's limited criteria, there is no possibility to cover the entire population in need.

Solid fuel needs have been covered by such organizations as NRC, Project Hope, PAH, UNICEF, and ICRC. The hromada also identified uncovered needs for 52 HHs. Beneficiary lists were compiled by local authorities and verified

by partners, but concerns remain over selection criteria. Based on information from the local authorities, organizations did not exclusively register vulnerable categories of people. Authorities also reflected that they had limited interactions with certain organizations, and therefore cases of duplication of assistance were noted. The hromada reports that over 50 vulnerable households were excluded from enrolment in the programs of humanitarian organizations.

Under the 993 program, assistance was limited to those within a 10 km zone. No local budget funds are expected, and firewood was last purchased from the local budget in 2022.



Figure 1. Storage of firewood purchased with cash assistance for solid fuel.



Figure 2. Storage of firewood purchased with cash for winter energy.

Malodanylivska hromada. As of today, the hromada's population stands at 13,278 individuals. Approximately 3,000 individuals are registered as IDPs, though the actual number of IDPs is around 1,000. Excluding IDPs, an estimated 8,600 individuals belong to different vulnerable categories. All settlements are gasified, except for one village where households rely on stove heating, using briquettes and firewood.

Organizations providing solid fuel assistance include:

- Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv (under the UNICEF program) – provided cash assistance and briquettes for families with children despite the presence of gas as a heating resource.
- UNHCR: 30 HHs received assistance under Resolution 993
- Avalist and Diakoniya Ukraine Foundation

Additional information is needed regarding NRC, Unity and Strength, and other organizations, because the hromada representatives did not indicate communication with these organizations during the winterization process and do not know about their implementation within the hromada

The administration prefers in-kind assistance over cash-based modality. As they reported, this makes it easier to track duplication of aid, because humanitarian organizations are not always doing a good job of communicating with the hromada on their plans and assistance.

The local budget cannot cover solid fuel needs. The halt of 10 major enterprises is expected to further reduce budget revenue. Significant unmet needs remain within the 15 km zone.

In the event of shelling, the hromada receives emergency repair materials from Proliska and the Relief Coordination Centre's (RCC) Rapid Response Team. The population also applies for E-recovery compensation. It was noted that there is currently no need for light and medium humanitarian repairs in the hromada. However, the Cluster informed the hromada administration about potential solutions for beneficiaries whose homes were destroyed and may qualify for the UNHCR modular housing program.

Roganska hromada. The total population of the hromada is 16,500 individuals, with approximately 30% classified as vulnerable groups, including elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, and low-income households.



Figure 3. Firewood provided in-kind

The estimated number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is 5,000, though only about 3,000 currently reside in the hromada. The largest number of IDPs comes from Kupianskyi Raion, with most living with relatives and acquaintances rather than in official collective centers. An officially registered collective centre accommodates elderly and mobility-impaired IDPs from Lyptsi, Vovchansk, and Kupiansk.

The hromada is 95% gas-connected, but damage from hostilities and inadequate maintenance due to the war has led to widespread disruptions in supply. Households that remain without reliable gas access rely on solid fuel heating, primarily firewood and briquettes.

As of the beginning of 2025, almost all the hromada's solid fuel needs were covered. In total, 474 HHs applied for heating assistance, with 154 currently receiving aid from the ICRC.

Several humanitarian organizations are

actively supporting the hromada, including UNHCR, I Am Saved and KBC.

However, 40 HHs without centralized heating remain in need of assistance, lacking access to alternative sources.

Humanitarian organizations relied on lists submitted by the hromada's representatives without conducting additional assessments. These lists were initially compiled in the fall during the registration process for assistance under Resolution 993. Individuals who did not receive cash support for solid fuel from UNHCR were referred to other humanitarian agencies. Authorities stated that both those with gas heating and solid fuel users were included in the registration for assistance. It was noted that the population has the opportunity to receive subsidies, but applications for such assistance are often refused due to documented data on the number of registered people reported to be living in the household who are actually residing in other locations.

While last year, funds were allocated from the local budget, the situation has drastically changed. This year, the local budget decreased by 40%. The economic situation has worsened due to the shutdown of key enterprises, leading to reduced tax revenue. Only 10% of businesses have returned to the Roganska hromada near Kharkiv, further limiting financial capacity. In contrast, 80% of the population has returned, increasing the demand for assistance while financial support remains constrained.

The hromada does not have its own forestry, meaning all firewood must be imported from other regions. There is no issue withdrawing cash, but transportation, storage, and distribution logistics remain challenging. The hromada is currently inclined toward cash-based assistance, as it allows for greater flexibility in purchasing solid fuel.

Liquefied gas is not a feasible solution for the hromada, as the necessary infrastructure and supply chains are not in place, and distribution is logistically difficult.

In the event of shelling, the community receives emergency repair materials from Proliska and the Relief Coordination Centre's (RCC) Rapid Response Team. The community also noted that the feasibility of providing pre-repair materials significantly outweighs the need to distribute them specifically in the form of kits. The hromada also has a stock of materials in case humanitarian assistance is not feasible. E-recovery was discussed. Residents are actively applying, except for households who have problems with documentation. At the time of the meeting, 3 private homes that were damaged during the shelling on January 28 required repair work. To conclude, some government assistance programs are active, but they do not fully meet the hromada's needs. The construction of shelters is the most urgent need. Representatives of local authorities reported that technical documentation has been developed. However, due to the need to build shelters from scratch, there is a significant lack of funds for implementation. Regarding winter assistance, adjustments to the selection criteria and distribution mechanisms are necessary to improve effectiveness and ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable.

Provision of solid fuel

During the monitoring mission, seventeen households were visited. Nine households received cash assistance for solid fuel, the other eight received solid fuel in the form of briquettes (for 2 HHs) and firewood (for 5 HHs). 8 out of 17 HHs do not have gas as an alternative source of heating. However, it is used as a supplementary heating source due to its low heat output or high cost. The assistance from organizations was provided between mid-December and mid-January, but the solid fuel distribution campaign is still ongoing, during the heating season. According to distribution lists, the amount of briquettes, firewood and cash provided followed Shelter Cluster recommendations— 3.4 tons per household for briquettes, 7,5 stacked m3, or from 21000 to 21800 UAH.

The volume of briquettes provided, their packaging, delivery method, and quality aligned with the recommendations of the Shelter Cluster. However, 1 HH reported a significant difference in quality between two batches of briquettes from the same partner. The briquettes were wrapped in film, which effectively prevented moisture exposure. Two households using briquettes stated that they use firewood to light them but were unable to specify the exact amount needed. They believed that the quantity of briquettes is not enough for the entire winter season.



Figure 4. Example of briquettes.

Households that received firewood assistance reported that it was delivered directly to their homes. However, 4 out of 8 households noted that the quantity received did not match the amount stated in the distribution lists. It was noted that the identified issues were not reported to the distributing humanitarian organizations due to beneficiaries' limited awareness of complaints and feedback mechanisms and uncertainty about the appropriateness of submitting complaints. People appreciate any amount of assistance, as it helps ease their family's financial burden. Additionally, it was highlighted that, in most cases, the firewood was delivered unstacked and loose. Partners are reminded to reference the Winterization Guidelines and specifically the technical annex 12.5 on Conversion of Stacked Wood to Solid content and 12.6 on verification documents to verify the legality of firewood origin. All recipients of heating firewood noted that the quantity was not enough to cover the entire winter period.

Among the nine households that received cash assistance for purchasing solid fuel, five reported spending the entire amount immediately on firewood. One household used the cash to pay utility bills and cover personal expenses. Three households stated that, due to the late distribution of aid, they plan to save the money for purchasing solid fuel for the next heating season as they had already purchased solid fuel before receiving the assistance. Three households reported purchasing firewood from suppliers involved in illegal logging, as this significantly reduces the cost of solid fuel. Two households purchased firewood from a supplier who did not provide supporting documents verifying its origin, raising the possibility that the wood was illegally harvested. Beyond the risks of purchasing illegal wood and the misuse of cash assistance, beneficiaries expressed concerns that local authorities, may favor certain suppliers with inflated prices. Additionally, suppliers often significantly increase prices after news of humanitarian cash assistance reaches beneficiaries. During the monitoring mission, some households in remote villages reported that suppliers raised prices by UAH 500 to 1,500 within just a few days. Four households identified the amount provided is insufficient to purchase enough solid fuel for the entire winter period. Six households also reported that they know how to call the organization providing assistance, but do not understand which issues and problems they can discuss with the organizations.

Only 8 households out of 17 were registered directly through the implementing organization. The other 9 had no direct contact with the organization's representatives before the monitoring mission.

Overall, respondents understood which vulnerability category they fell into, explaining their eligibility for assistance. However, aside from three households that received aid due to the presence of children, others did not receive further clarification as to why they were selected to receive assistance. This raises some protection concerns, as three households assumed they were selected for other reasons than humanitarian vulnerability criteria. This misunderstanding on the part of beneficiaries could create tensions with other beneficiaries of solid fuel programming, and organizations should be careful to increase their accountability to affected populations. During the enrolment or distribution stage, recipients were not offered alternative types of solid fuel or modalities

Except for five households, all other beneficiaries (12) expressed concerns that the assistance received might not be sufficient if weather conditions deteriorate and temperatures drop significantly.

Cluster partners should exercise greater diligence in selecting beneficiaries according to established technical and vulnerability criteria, as a cursory review of some households raised doubts about their eligibility. Additionally, the needs assessment process should be improved through more direct engagement with affected households before assistance is distributed. Beyond this, the monitoring mission also highlighted the need for increased monitoring of the procurement process for firewood and enhanced compliance with the Winterization Recommendations 2024-25. This would enhance accountability and ensure that aid reaches those without access to gas heating. Partners providing cash assistance for solid fuel purchases should also ensure that beneficiaries are properly informed about the intended use of funds and implement follow-up monitoring to assess compliance.



Figure 5. Example of firewood purchased after receiving cash for solid fuel.

Recommendations:

Recommendation	To Whom
Shelter Cluster partners should enhance needs assessments and beneficiary selection in alignment with the Shelter Cluster Winterization Recommendations and the Activity Handbook	Partners
Shelter Cluster partners should strengthen collaboration with local authorities on beneficiary selection, ensuring they are informed about assistance decisions, vulnerability criteria, and key aspects of humanitarian programs.	Partners
Shelter Cluster partners should consult beneficiaries during assessments to identify urgent needs, inform them about available assistance options, and align expectations with program timelines.	Partners
Partners should differentiate assistance programs based on the Activity Matrix, Activities Handbook, and other Cluster documents, considering their objectives,	



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application, and modalities. For households connected to the general gas network, the “Cash for Utilities” program should be used.	
Organizations providing cash assistance should strengthen beneficiary awareness regarding the legal aspects of firewood procurement.	Partners
Partners should inform beneficiaries that cash assistance for solid fuel is strictly for purchasing solid fuel. In collaboration with local authorities, they should monitor compliance with beneficiary obligations upon receiving the funds.	Partners
Shelter Cluster to consider creation of standardized ICE communication materials for Winter 2025-26 for enhanced communication with beneficiaries on timelines, purpose of cash, legality of firewood, and fire and carbon monoxide prevention when burning of solid fuel	Shelter Cluster and Winterization TWIG 2025-26
The Shelter Cluster should include in the winterization technical documentation: -Clear packaging requirements for solid fuels, particularly briquettes, to ensure proper storage. -Provisions for supplying materials for briquette ignition.	Shelter Cluster
Shelter Cluster partners to ensure post distribution monitoring of their solid fuel interventions through the Shelter Cluster's standardized post distribution monitoring form and to share findings with local authorities to enhance understanding about effectiveness of cash and in-kind forms of assistance	Partners, Shelter Cluster East Hub together with Oblast Authorities