

UNHCR Border Monitoring

Sumyski Transit Center
Sumy, April to June 2024 (Q2)

The international border crossing points (BCP) between Ukraine and the Russian Federation have been non-functional since February 2022. However, a humanitarian corridor between the two countries (Kolotylyvka BCP of the Russian Federation and Pokrovka BCP of Ukraine) allows for returns of Ukrainian nationals (one-way) by foot since April 2023.

UNHCR monitoring teams were deployed in May 2023, with systematic monitoring established in late July the same year.

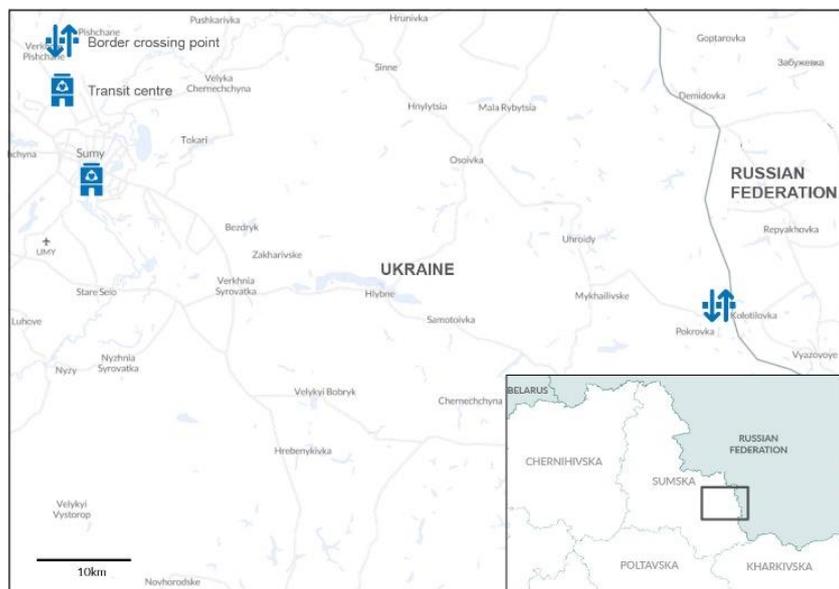


Provision of services in the transit center in Sumy. © Right to Protection

In 2023, all people arriving through the Kolotylyvka-Pokrovka humanitarian corridor were undergoing screening in Krasnopillia – a town located 18 km from the border. Since 26 January 2024, the location for the screening procedures changed to Sumy due to the deterioration of the security situation in Krasnopillia.

As of 26 January 2024, in Krasnopillia, border guards check passports and/or any other documents or copies thereof confirming the right to enter Ukraine, while all other security screening procedures by security and law enforcement agencies are conducted in the transit centre in Sumy.

People spend several hours in the transit centre, as everyone has to wait for the completion of the screening of the entire group before they are transferred to a hub where they can stay overnight or continue their journey. Since 10 May 2024, the screening procedure in the transit centre requires all luggage to go through an X-ray scanner extending the overall duration of the screening procedure by an hour. Typically, when more than 15 people arrive together, the screening interviews and luggage screening are done simultaneously to shorten the duration of stay at the transit centre.



The following is available at the transit center:

- Rooms of law enforcement officers conducting the screening
 - Doctor's room with a bathroom
 - Canteen
 - Changing and storage rooms
 - Children's playroom
 - Room for pets
 - Room for mothers and babies
 - Toilets and showers
- NGOs can meet returnees and work in the corridors of the centre.

METHODOLOGY

At the end of May 2023, UNHCR deployed border monitoring teams through local NGO partners to provide information and assistance to individuals returning to Ukraine via the border with the Russian Federation in Krasnopillia hromada (Pokrovka border point) in Sumska Oblast. UNHCR partners provide legal assistance, protection counselling, and social support to people in transit five days a week at the transit centre in Sumy, and have access to provide services at the hub in Sumy as well.

Protection monitoring teams conduct individual interviews with people returning to Ukraine. In April – June 2024, a total of 163 people were interviewed (36% females 18-59 years, 10% males 18-59 years, 36% females 60+ years, 15% males 60+ years, 2% females 0-17 years, 1% males 0-17). This note presents the findings of these interviews and other observations made by the border monitors during the second quarter of 2024.

1. Return Movements

The number of daily arrivals through the humanitarian corridor has slightly decreased from quarter one to quarter by 8 per cent. The figures of daily arrivals remain modest during the reporting period and have reduced further since Q1 of 2024, according to monitors, with an average of 28 persons crossing each day (in comparison to 77 in 2023/Q4 and 32 in 2024/Q1).

Over the past year, since July 2023 when border monitoring began, there has been a noticeable overall decline in arrivals through the humanitarian corridor. While the drop in arrivals during the winter months of 2024 was largely attributed to weather conditions, other factors play into this continuing decline:

- High cost of travel: Transportation costs have increased from any given settlement in the temporarily occupied territories. The cost is uniform and even applies to pets. There are individuals, who succeed to get to Kolotylivka BCP in the Russian Federation by railway connection or other public transportation and assistance of volunteers, which allows them to reduce travel costs significantly. However, according to monitors, this remains a minority.
- Length and complexity of travel: Border monitors reported that some arrivals spend over three days just to get to the Kolotylivka BCP in the Russian Federation. Another obstacle for travelers is the complexity of arranging the needed logistics for their travels, especially for persons with disabilities, older persons and travelers with children or pets.
- Security: Border monitors reported numerous attacks on the Sumy region, including missiles, guided aviation bombs, and other security concerns. The escalation of hostilities in Kharkivska oblast in May 2024 has fueled rumors of a similar scenario in Sumska oblast. These security issues have heightened fears among travelers, reflected in increased inquiries about the security situation on social media channels.

Some new trends were reported by monitors:

- Arrivals of families. There is a growing trend of one family member (predominantly a woman) arriving alone to scout suitable living arrangements. Subsequently, the rest of the family follows. In addition, there is a trend of increasing numbers of families arrive with children.
- Regions of departures. According to monitors, the majority of arrivals in Q2 are coming from Zaporizka and Khersonska oblasts, with less arrivals reported from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Additionally, monitors report that in some instances, people were compelled to travel through the Russian Federation and enter Ukraine via the humanitarian corridor as they were unable to evacuate from Kharkivska oblast due to shifts in frontlines.
- Decrease in arrivals of men of conscription age. Partners report smaller numbers of men aged 18-60 crossing the border reasons for which require further monitoring.
- Number of people with limited mobility increased due to extended possibilities for humanitarian actors (Helping to Leave and Red Cross) to assist them passing through the two-kilometer unpaved road between Russian and Ukrainian BCPs.

2. Key Monitoring Findings

	Total	0-17	18-59	60+
Female	120	2	59	59
Male	43	3	24	16

Figure 1. People surveyed after arriving to Ukraine in 2024/Q2

In the second quarter of 2024, monitors surveyed 163 arriving individuals, which is almost 30% less than in the first quarter. Partners reported challenges in conducting interviews due to changes in the arrival procedures, related to the bus transport from the BCP to the transit centre in Sumy. As the bus now waits until all seats are filled, arrivals at the transit centre are delayed often arriving right at curfew hours when border monitors have to leave.

The proportion of interviewed men decreased from 44% to 26% in this reporting period and is consistent with the percentage of interviews with males in the last quarter of 2023 (24%). This is likely related to an increase in arrivals of males in quarter 1 of 2024 (reportedly due to the release of men from penitentiary facilities). There was also a change in the number of older people interviewed, from 126 to 75, with the proportion of men among them decreasing by more than 75% (from 66 to 16). The proportion of men of conscription age (18-59) remained the same as the previous reporting period but declined in absolute numbers.

The humanitarian corridor procedure (according to border monitors)

According to reports of people crossing the borders via the humanitarian corridor, the reported schedule did not have many amendments. Detailed description of the procedures was provided in the [Sumy snapshot for the first quarter of 2024](#).

Monitors noted instances where access to the humanitarian corridor was restricted delaying the border crossing. On one occasion, groups traveling with transport providers arrived at the Kolotylivka BCP (Russian Federation) and were reportedly prevented from further travel requiring them to stay overnight in a hostel and proceed the following day through the humanitarian corridor. In contrast, on the same day, individuals traveling independently were permitted to cross the border.

Compared to 2023, according to border monitors, arrivals in 2024 report increased difficulties with screening procedures at the Kolotylivka BCP, including reports of being threatened, intimidated or held back. There have been reports from individuals who successfully crossed the border but witnessed others being denied passage through the corridor. Arrivals also noted the lack of water and food at that BCP, as well as very limited possibilities to obtain medical care if needed.

Protection concerns

Unaccompanied and separated children. (1) A 12-year-old boy crossed the border accompanied by a stranger with a power of attorney for border crossing. (2) A 17-year-old girl traveled alone and was transported to Dnipro, where her older brother met her. They previously lived in a village in Khersonska oblast (temporarily occupied territory). The brother now resides in Mykolaivska oblast, and the girl has joined him there.

Security threats as a push factor. People are experiencing increased war-related security concerns and facing unpredictable developments regarding access to services, particularly those without a Russian Federation passport.

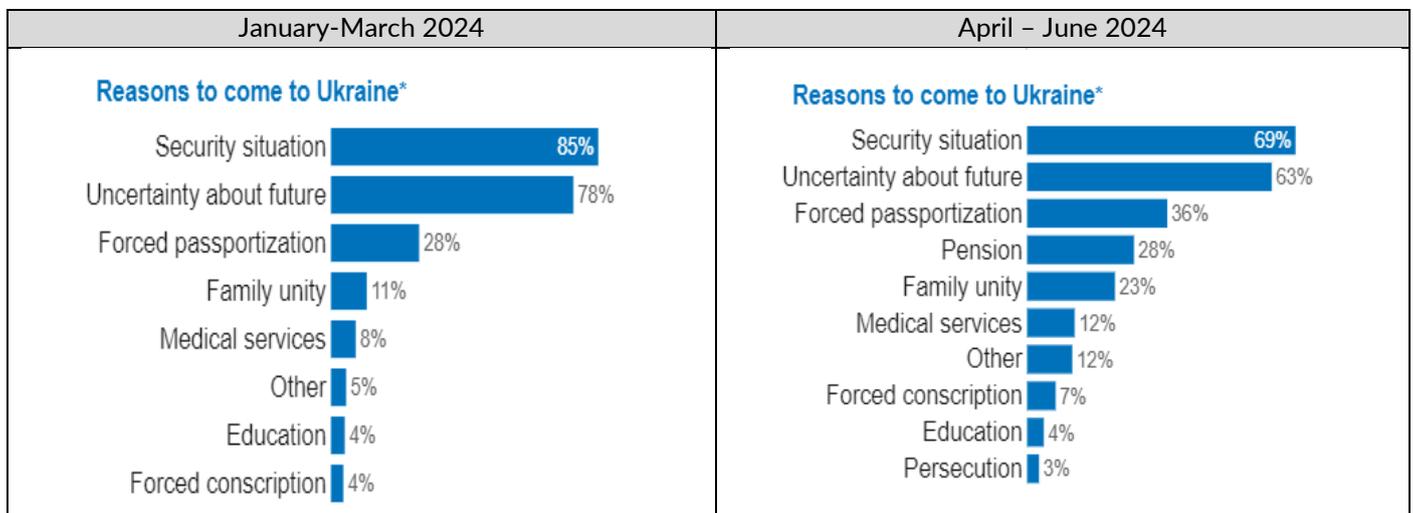
Denials to go through humanitarian corridor. Arrivals informed monitoring partners about two people who did not undergo screening procedures in Kolotylivka BCP and were denied leaving the Russian Federation.

Return to Ukraine – Motivations and Intentions

Among those interviewed during the reporting period, 71 % intend to remain in Ukraine permanently, which is 11% less than in the first quarter of 2024.

Only three respondents mentioned that they would continue their journey to Europe (one older persons cited Germany, a lady of working age cites Poland, and the third individual had not decided). There were 40 people who said they would return to the temporarily occupied territories, including 30 persons aged 60+, further firming up the assumption that some residents of temporarily occupied territories may use the humanitarian corridor to renew access to their Ukrainian pensions.

The graph below demonstrates the main reasons of people to come to Ukraine:



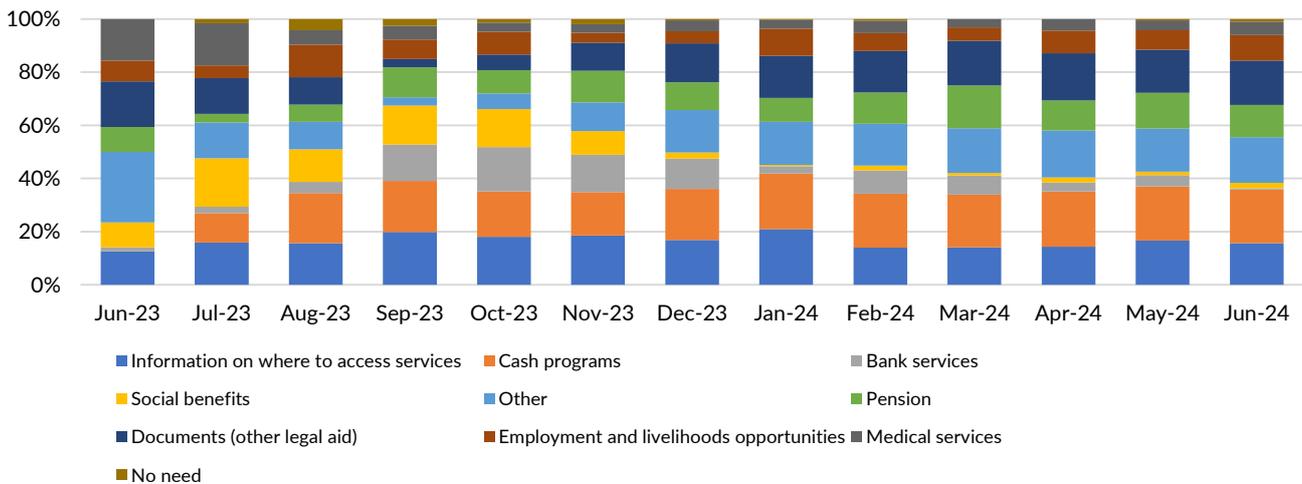
*Percentages above are based upon the total number of individuals interviewed by UNHCR Border Monitoring Teams during April-June 2024.

Security concerns in the place of departure remain the main reason for people to pass through the humanitarian corridor. According to monitors, arrivals report increased number of visits to their homes by occupying authorities, notably affecting psychological state of families with children. Apart from security concerns in the place of departure, uncertainty about the future, alongside the forced issuance of passports are the primary reasons prompting people to return to Ukraine. While these three main reasons remain consistent in the first half of 2024, there has been a noticeable shift in the distribution of motivations. 28% of respondents in Q2 reported access to pensions as a main motivating factor which was not a considerable factor in Q1. Another change is seen in the importance of family unity, which accounted for 23% in Q2, 12 % up from the first quarter of 2024. This increase in family-related motivations aligns with partners' observations regarding the number of arriving families. In the second quarter, respondents newly quote 'persecution' as a reason for their movement.

Priority needs upon return

According to below distribution (multiple selection possible), cash assistance was the top priority (74%) for arrivals. Equally important were requests for assistance with renewal or obtaining of documents (69%) and information on available services (60%). Issues of pensions (48%) and employment opportunities (33%) complete the list of top five priorities of people upon return in the first quarter of 2024. The decrease in the number of requests on pension issues is explained by the smaller share of older people interviewed crossing the border in the reporting period, and is not necessarily an indication of lesser relevance as access to pension remains a main factor why people come to Ukraine via the humanitarian corridor. The majority of people of working age said that they are in need of information about employment and livelihood opportunities (55% of female and 88% of males of working age).

Main needs upon return



R2P monitor and lawyer providing services at transit center. © Right to Protection.

3. Humanitarian Assistance Provided to People Crossing

UNHCR partners, Proliska and Right to Protection (R2P), provide MHPSS services and legal counseling respectively at the transit centre. Both partners also inform people about the available services in Ukraine.

In Q2/2024, R2P provided 71 legal consultations, while Proliska reported an average of 7 cases per day requiring psychosocial services. During the reporting period, R2P assisted 5 individuals with obtaining their passports. This statistic includes only those who chose to stay in Sumy and does not account for individuals referred to other regions for service provision and support based on their oblast of destination.

An example to illustrate the criticality of legal assistance to arrivals via the humanitarian corridor: R2P supported a male in obtaining an ID document. At the time of his town's occupation, he was under 14 years old and only had a Ukrainian birth certificate when crossing the border. To obtain an ID card,

he needed to go through a court procedure, for which he required the help of R2P that was able to successfully support him.

The following support is provided by the Government, humanitarian and other partners (in addition to R2P and Proliska) in the return process via the humanitarian corridor. Following the changes to the corridor procedure by shifting it largely to Sumy, the majority of partners has adjusted their presence accordingly.

Organization	Services
Government	
SBGS	Free transportation to Sumy
Social Protection	Registration for one time of cash assistance from the state
Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railroad)	Free transportation to Kyiv
Humanitarian/Other	
World Central Kitchen	Food assistance (ad hoc)
Skhid SOS	Transportation (ad hoc), mobile teams of lawyers, psychologists, and social workers
Helping to Leave (in association with Way of Ukraine)	Transportation to Kharkiv; protection counselling. Assistance with identification of housing solutions in Ukraine. Further psychological support and assistance with integration for beneficiaries after settling in a new location.
Pluriton	Psychological assistance, maintenance of the Sumy hub
IOM (through PHI)	Cash assistance