



MONITORING MISSION REPORT
Winterization: Solid Fuel Assistance

The East Hub team of the Shelter Cluster participated in the monitoring missions in Kharkivska Oblast organized by UHF and OCHA teams, with the participation of Help (Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe).

These missions aimed to assess the outcomes of the solid fuel distribution project in Staryi Saltiv, Vilkhivka, and Momotove settlements. This project was implemented by Help, funded by the UHF, under the Shelter Cluster AoR. The mission focused on developing mechanisms for timely updates on needs, and coordinating the implementation of solid fuel assistance. Additionally, it identified potential gaps and documented best practices.

As part of the mission, interviews were conducted with beneficiaries, and a meeting was held with the head of the Staryi Saltiv administration.

The mission visited six households that received in-kind assistance for heating during the 2024-2025 winter period in the form of wood-based briquettes.

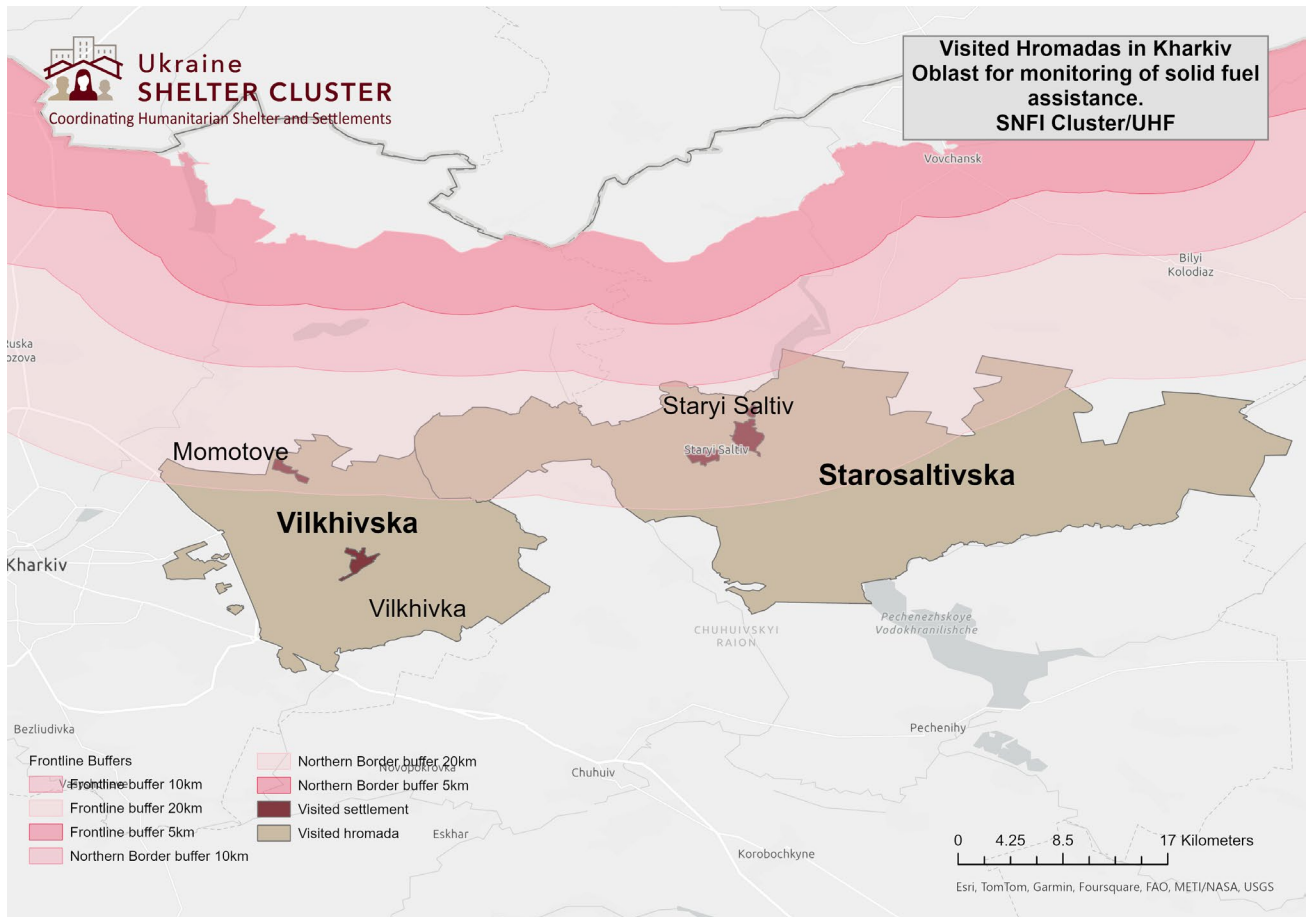


Figure 1. Area visited.



Date of visit:	February 7, 2025
Locations:	- Staryi Saltiv village, Starosaltivska hromada, Chuguyivskiyi raion - Vilkhivka and Momotove villages, Vilkhivska hromada, Kharkivskiyi raion
Participants:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head of Starosaltivska hromada• UHF team• OCHA team• SNFI Cluster team• Help team.

Context

Starosaltivska hromada. As of 01.02.2025, the total population of the hromada was 4906 individuals (2374 households). 1348 individuals registered in hromada as IDPs, though approximately 70 individuals are residing in the hromada who have not registered as IDPs. The hromada is home to 688 children under the age of 18. 2158 people of retirement age, and 355 people with disabilities.

The local budget was primarily sustained through taxes from local enterprises engaged in grain crop cultivation, sawmilling, soft drink production, and other industries. However, due to the closure or significant decline in production and business activities, the budget is now insufficient to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the population.

The hromada has a forest, an operational sawmill, and the capacity to produce firewood. Local authorities also provide logistical support, which was successfully utilized during the implementation of HELP's project.

The administration reported that as of early February, the solid fuel needs of vulnerable populations had been fully met.

The majority of households in the hromada are connected to the central gas supply network, which has been fully restored. However, some households were intentionally disconnected from the gas network, with reconnection costs estimated at approximately \$20.



Figure 2. Thick-walled stoves for fuel with high heat capacity.



At the start of the assistance program, many beneficiaries declined briquettes and pellets due to concerns that their high heat output could damage stoves not designed for such fuel. Another common reason for refusals was the lack of suitable dry storage space for these fuel types.

According to the administration, for the next heating season, briquette and pellet distributions should also include a small quantity of logs for kindling.

Beneficiary lists were compiled by the administration and then handed over to partners for selection and verification. The hromada also operates subsidy programs and an assistance program under Resolution 993.

A major concern for the hromada is the lack of adequate coordination with UNHCR and the Ministry of Reintegration regarding the selection of beneficiaries for cash assistance of 21,000 UAH. The hromada initially submitted a list of 1,900 vulnerable individuals for the program. A month later, approval was granted for only 300 people, and the process was then paused without further updates. Due to the lack of information on the status of the remaining beneficiaries, the hromada had to rely on partners and the local budget to address these needs.

According to the head of the hromada, UNHCR informed about the allocation of funds for an additional 400 households, but by that time, some had already received assistance from other sources. This misalignment led to dissatisfaction among beneficiaries and social tension, as some households ended up receiving double assistance while others remained unsupported. The statements from the hromada require further verification and in-depth assessment. One of the challenges to verifying this statement is that according to the coordination of East Hub, Starosaltivska Hromada had 9 partners working in the location, but only Medair and UNHCR uploaded their data to the RAIS+ platform for deduplication.

Provision of solid fuel

HELP implemented its project in the hromada in collaboration with the local humanitarian NGO Good Actions, which was not originally included in the initial agreements with UHF.

Currently, Good Actions works with both HELP and ARCHE NOVA and operates in 19 settlements within the Starosaltivska hromada. Other active organizations in the hromada include CF Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv and UNICEF; however, their beneficiary selection criteria remain unclear. In 2022, RCC was also active in the area, but they are no longer operational in the hromada.

The selection and verification of beneficiaries for solid fuel assistance were conducted by NGO Good Actions based on lists provided by the local administration, which are updated every three months. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between them, enabling local services to assist with logistics, including unloading and transporting solid fuel to beneficiaries' yards when needed.



Figure 3. Different packaging of briquettes from one partner.



Figure 4. Briquettes in grain bags.



Good Actions is familiar with the Shelter Cluster's recommendations and vulnerability criteria but requires further guidance on existing coordination and deduplication tools. The distribution of solid fuel began in September and was initially planning to cover 496 households. In January, an additional opportunity arose, allowing the needs of 60 more households to be met.

Of the six households surveyed, only one is not connected to the central gas supply network. Another household reported that while it is connected, it can only use gas for cooking due to unfinished internal work, making gas heating unavailable. Except for one household, all others use gas for cooking, and some also use it for heating instead of solid fuel.

None of the surveyed households were aware of the possibility of receiving humanitarian cash assistance for utility payments during the heating season. All households connected to the central gas supply indicated they would prefer cash assistance for utilities over solid fuel.

While all households expressed a desire to choose their preferred type of solid fuel, most stated they would accept briquettes. This preference is partly due to the sharp increase in firewood prices after beneficiaries receive financial assistance. Additionally, all households use firewood purchased with their own funds for kindling briquettes. Although they could not specify the exact amount needed, they agreed that it is a relatively small quantity.

One household expressed a preference for firewood over briquettes, claiming that briquettes produce excessive smoke and soot. However, none of the other households confirmed this issue.

Four households stated that the allocated briquettes might not be sufficient in case of a significant temperature drop. These households generally have large living spaces with relatively few occupants. The partner distributed briquettes in various packaging types and volumes, including grain bags. As a



Figure 6. Wetting of briquettes due to improper storage.



Figure 5. Briquettes damaged during unloading.

result, some beneficiaries received 70 bags of briquettes, while others received 140 bags, despite having the same household size. The partner attributed this discrepancy to differences in bag size. However, since the bags appear only slightly different in size, this issue requires further checking. In most cases, the partner adhered to Shelter Cluster recommendations, providing households with 3.5 metric tons of briquettes.

Additionally, the actual volume of solid fuel delivered requires verification. Some households reported receiving only 2.8 metric tons instead of the minimum 3.42 metric tons recommended by the Cluster.

The mission recorded a case where improper delivery and unloading resulted in significant damage to the briquettes, causing them to crumble into small fragments. In another instance, several bags of briquettes were



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exposed to moisture and developed mold due to a lack of proper storage facilities, as grain bags do not provide adequate insulation against moisture.

Despite these issues, all households reported high satisfaction with the quality of the briquettes and had positive feedback on the partner's work, their attitude towards beneficiaries, and the timely delivery of solid fuel. Good Actions, as a locally well-known organization, has built trust among beneficiaries, who know where to seek assistance in the future.

Recommendations:

Recommendation	To Whom
To consult beneficiaries during assessments to identify urgent needs, inform them about available assistance options, and align expectations with program timelines.	Partners
To differentiate assistance programs based on the Activity Matrix, Activities Handbook, and other Cluster documents such as the Winterization Recommendations 2024-25, considering their objectives, application, and modalities. For households connected to the general gas network, the "Cash for Utilities" program should be used.	Partners
To 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. -If necessary, additional cost assessments should be conducted, and recommendations should be updated accordingly.	Shelter Cluster and Winterization TWIG 2025-26
A thorough assessment should be conducted to determine whether stoves not adapted for high heat output are at risk of damage. Beneficiaries' concerns about potential harm should be considered. If no significant risk is confirmed, partners and local authorities should engage in awareness-raising efforts to clarify this issue.	Shelter Cluster and Winterization TWIG 2025-26
Control measures should be strengthened to oversee the delivery and unloading of solid fuel, particularly when local authorities' logistical support is utilized.	Partners
To ensure fairness and consistency, all beneficiaries within a single settlement should receive solid fuel in standardized, specialized packaging with a uniform volume, adjusted to account for household size and composition.	Partners
Beneficiaries should be informed that the primary objective of humanitarian solid fuel assistance is to ensure the heating of a minimum area necessary for dignified living conditions.	Partners, Shelter Cluster East Hub together with Oblast Authorities
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