



Ukraine: Humanity & Inclusion's (HI) statement on the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the rising civilian toll (January - March 2026)

Ukraine enters the fifth year of full-scale war with a humanitarian crisis that remains severe, driven by relentless attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. Between January and March 2026, Russian forces continued indiscriminate strikes across the country, **killing at least 566 civilians and injuring 2731**¹. Near-daily bombardments targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, leaving millions without electricity, heating, or water during sub-zero temperatures in January and February. Thirty-nine percent of casualties were caused by long-range missile and drone attacks in urban centers far from the frontline, while the remainder were concentrated in frontline areas, where short-range drones, artillery, and aerial bombardments inflicted heavy losses. Repeated attacks on combined heat and power plants and substations deprived thousands of apartment buildings of central heating, disrupted hospitals and schools, and forced vulnerable residents, including older people and those with limited mobility to resort to unsafe coping mechanisms. Ukrainian forces have also conducted strikes against Russian energy infrastructure, primarily targeting oil and gas facilities. HI has not access to verified data on the impact of such strikes.

Overall, the **civilian toll in Ukraine since February 2022 has risen to 58930 killed or injured, underscoring the devastating impact of indiscriminate assaults on civilians and the urgent need for strengthened humanitarian protection.**

During the first quarter of 2026, Russia has carried out **near-daily strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure**. According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission (HRMMU)³, key elements of the power grid have been damaged in **at least 17 regions, resulting in prolonged outages of electricity, heat, and water**. Millions of people had access to electricity for only a few hours a day. Attacks also repeatedly struck infrastructure providing central heating to cities. In Kyiv city, for example, missiles and drones struck two combined heat and power plants several times, **disrupting central heating to nearly 6,000 multi-story buildings each time**. The damage was ultimately so extensive that authorities

¹ [Protection of civilians | UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine](#)

² [Energy attacks amid an unusually harsh winter are exposing Ukraine's civilians to extreme hardship UN human rights monitors say](#)

announced that they would **not be able to restore central heating to more than 1,100 multi-story buildings this winter**. This led to a critical drop in temperatures in apartments, forcing some residents to relocate. People with limited mobility, families with young children, and elderly residents were particularly affected, for whom basic survival became a daily challenge.^{3,3}

Russia also carried out **a series of strikes on medical facilities in Ukraine**, including hospitals supported by UNFPA. On March 31, a maternity hospital in Sloviansk was damaged, becoming the sixth UNFPA facility to be hit this year. Earlier, on March 28, an attack in Odesa damaged Maternity Hospital No. 5, where 32 patients, 22 newborns, and 27 medical workers were present, all were successfully evacuated without casualties. Three days earlier, on March 24, a strike on the Kharkiv region injured patients, and damage to the maternity ward in Ivano-Frankivsk resulted in the deaths of two people. In total, since the start of the full-scale invasion, **nearly 3,000 attacks on medical facilities have been recorded, placing extraordinary pressure on the healthcare system**. Attacks on hospitals, especially maternity wards, constitute a gross violation of international humanitarian law and have devastating consequences for the health of women and newborns.⁴

OCHA confirmed that in February 2026, **children across Ukraine lost an average of 16.5 school days due to power and heating outages**, as well as school closures in frontline areas.⁵ In frontline regions, particularly Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia, schools suffered significant damage, forcing children to study remotely or in temporary facilities. The loss of access to education deprives children not only of knowledge but also of social and emotional development, posing a risk to an entire generation.

A disturbing **new trend of Russian attacks targeting civilian trains in Ukraine** indicates an expansion of attacks on critical civilian infrastructure and mobility. Russia has launched a targeted “hunt” for Ukrainian trains, using a combination of drone and missile strikes. These incidents have killed and injured passengers and disrupted key transportation systems.

These attacks on civilian infrastructure and their disastrous humanitarian impact highlight the devastation caused by certain types of weapons when used in populated areas, in particular the following:

^{3,3} [Amnesty International Ukraine: New testimonies document brutal conditions for civilians amid Russian attacks on energy infrastructure](#)

⁴ [Sixth UNFPA-supported Medical Facility in Ukraine attacked this year](#)

⁵ [UNOCHA Ukraine-situation-report-march-2026](#)

- **Loitering Munitions (Shahed-136/131)** Russia launched **thousands of Shahed drones in coordinated waves**, often at night, deliberately targeting Ukraine’s energy grid and residential areas. According to the Institute for Science and International Security, in the winter of 2026, Russia carried out **14 large-scale combined attacks, using Shahed drones** alongside missiles to overwhelm air defense systems.⁶ The systematic use of Shaheds created a climate of terror in major cities, forcing civilians to endure prolonged blackouts and heating outages.
- **Short-Range Drones (FPV, Lancet-type)** FPV drones continued to be used against **evacuation buses, humanitarian warehouses, and frontline towns** in Kherson, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia. OHCHR documented civilian deaths and injuries, including humanitarian workers and people with disabilities, as drones pursued victims in real time and struck ambulances.⁷
- **Aerial Bombs (Glide and Unguided)** Russia’s use of glide bombs reached record levels in March 2026, with **7,987 dropped in a single month**, devastating residential areas in Kharkiv and Donetsk⁸. Hospitals and clinics were destroyed, leaving communities without access to basic healthcare and compounding humanitarian needs.
- **Cruise and Ballistic Missiles (Kh-101, Iskander-M, Kalibr). On the night of 25 -26 February**, Russian forces launched 420 drones and **39 missiles**, including 11 Iskander-M ballistic missiles/S-300s, 24 Kh-101 cruise missiles, two Zircon/Onyx anti-ship missiles, and two Kh-69 cruise missiles, alongside hundreds of Shahed drones. Damaging gas infrastructure in Poltava, substations in Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk, and leaving large parts of Odesa, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv without electricity. Ukraine’s largest energy company, DTEK, reported “colossal destruction” to 45% of its Odesa substations.
On the night of 13 -14 March, Russia carried out another massive strike, launching two **Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles, 13 Iskander-M/S-400 ballistic missiles, 25 Kalibr cruise missiles, 24 Kh-101 cruise missiles, and four Kh-59/69 cruise missiles**, together with 430 drones (about 250 Shaheds). The systematic use of missiles - Iskander, Kalibr, Kh-101, Zircon, alongside Shahed drones, underscores **the intent to terrorize civilians and cripple essential services, compounding humanitarian needs and violating international humanitarian law.**^{9/10}

⁶ [Monthly Analysis of Russian Shahed 136 Deployment Against Ukraine](#)

⁷ [OHCHR All reports Ukraine](#)

⁸ [The Kyiv Independent Russia drops record number of deadly glide bombs on Ukraine, steps up aerial attacks](#)

⁹ <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-26-2026/>

¹⁰ <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-14-2026/>

The following chronology highlights the most devastating attacks in Ukraine impacting civilians from January to March, underscoring urgent protection needs and accountability gaps¹¹

January 2026

In January 2026, civilian casualties in Ukraine remained high, with at least **161 people killed and 757 injured**. About **39 percent of casualties** were caused by long-range missile and drone strikes in urban centers far from the frontline, while the majority occurred in frontline areas, where short-range drones, artillery, and aerial bombardments inflicted heavy losses. Civilian harm was recorded across **12 regions and Kyiv city**, underscoring the widespread impact of Russia's continued assaults on both frontline communities and densely populated urban areas.¹²

- [On January 5](#) in the Darivka community of Kherson region, Russian drones attacked a humanitarian aid distribution point, killing one man and injuring two others. On the same day, Russia launched a [massive combined attack](#) on Ukraine using both drones and missiles, with Kyiv among the main targets; debris from intercepted weapons struck a private clinic in the Obolonskyi district, killing one person and injuring another.
- [On January 6](#) in the city of Dnipro, Russian drone strikes on residential areas and educational institutions injured seven people, including two children.
- [On January 7](#), Russia launched a massive air attack on Ukraine using 95 strike drones and an Iskander-M ballistic missile; Ukrainian air defenses shot down 81 targets, but strikes hit eight locations, leaving one woman dead in Zhytomyr region and injuring at least 20 people (including seven in Dnipro, eight in Kryvyi Rih, and four in Zaporizhzhia), while attacks on substations and power lines caused emergency blackouts and forced nuclear plants to reduce output.
- [On the night of January 9](#), a large-scale aerial attack on Kyiv, killing four people and injuring 24, while damaging residential buildings, a kindergarten, vehicles, and infrastructure across several districts. In two days after Russia's massive attack 6,000 high-rise buildings were initially left without heating, and more than 1,000 remain without heat, while water supply has been fully restored and utility services continue round-the-clock repairs amid difficult energy conditions.
- [On January 12](#), Russian forces struck energy infrastructure facilities in Odesa Oblast, causing significant equipment damage and leaving about 33,500 consumers without electricity.

¹¹ The list below is not exhaustive and does not capture all incidents that occurred between January and March 2026. The attacks mentioned were chosen due to their significant impact on civilian lives and infrastructure.

¹² <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Protection-of-Civilians-in-Armed-Conflict-January-2026>

- [On January 19](#), four missiles struck a critical infrastructure facility in Kharkiv's Slobidskyi district, causing major damage to the city's energy system and infrastructure.
- [On January 22](#), an FPV drone struck a car delivering humanitarian bread on behalf of the UN World Food Programme near Kozacha Lopan in Kharkiv region, killing two local officials (aged 35 and 63) who were supporting the distribution; the vehicle was destroyed, marking the 69th attack on WFP-supported operations in two years, and highlighting the growing risks to humanitarian aid reaching frontline communities.
- [On January 27](#) near the village of Yazykove in Kharkiv region, [Russian kamikaze drones struck the passenger train "Barvinkove–Kharkiv–Chop,"](#) killing five people and injuring others.

February 2026

In February 2026, conflict-related violence in Ukraine killed at least **188 civilians and injured 757**, a toll similar to January but markedly higher than in previous years (31% more than February 2025 and 83% more than February 2024). About **36% of casualties** (60 killed, 276 injured) were caused **by long-range missile and drone strikes in urban centers far from the frontline**, while **near the frontline short-range drones remained the primary cause** (52 killed, 222 injured). Civilian harm from aerial bombs also rose sharply, with **40 killed and 107 injured**, nearly half again more than in January. Repeated Russian attacks on energy infrastructure, including six large-scale coordinated strikes and at least ten direct hits on combined heating and power plants, caused prolonged disruptions to electricity, heating, and water supplies during freezing winter conditions.¹³

- [On February 1](#) Russian drone strike hit a civilian bus near Pavlohrad and Ternivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, killing 12 miners from DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, and injuring 16 others. The bus was transporting workers to their shift and carried no military personnel. DTEK described this as its largest single loss of life since the start of Russia's full-scale war, underscoring the deliberate targeting of civilians whose work is vital to sustaining Ukraine's energy sector during winter.
- [On the night of February 3](#), Ukraine came under a large-scale strike involving more than 70 missiles and 450 combat drones, hitting eight regions and deliberately targeting civilian energy facilities, including thermal power plants and stations in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Dnipro. The attacks damaged infrastructure that provided heating, leaving hundreds of thousands of families without heat during severe winter frosts, and forced emergency power cuts on Kyiv's left bank.
- [On February 3](#), a Russian drone strike on Zaporizhzhia killed two 18-year-olds and injured at least 20 people, including four children (aged 11, 12, 15, and 17); the

¹³ https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Protection-of-Civilians-in-Armed-Conflict-February-2026?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PoC-Feb2026

attack damaged a multi-story residential building, shops, and cars, with fires breaking out in four vehicles before being extinguished by emergency services.

- [On February 7](#), Russia carried out one of its largest combined assaults on Ukraine, launching 408 drones and 39 missiles. Ukrainian defenses shot down most, but 26 drones and 24 missiles penetrated, causing devastating damage to energy infrastructure, including facilities linked to nuclear power plants - one plant was forced offline and others reduced output. The strikes left 300,000 people in Odesa without electricity and water, and about 200 buildings without heat, amid temperatures of -20°C. Civilians sheltered in metro stations, while emergency crews worked nonstop to restore power and heating.
- [On February 11](#), a drone strike destroyed a private home in Bohodukhiv, Kharkiv region, killing a 34-year-old father and his three children (twin boys aged two and a one-year-old girl), while their pregnant mother was rescued alive but seriously injured. Authorities declared three days of mourning in the town. That same night, further attacks killed two children in Sumy region and left 16 people injured, while strikes also hit Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Poltava, and Lviv, damaging civilian infrastructure including a hospital and railway facilities. In total, at least 10 civilians, including five children, were killed across Ukraine in this wave of attacks.
- [On the night of 21–22 February](#), a large-scale missile and drone attack on Kyiv Oblast killed 1 person and injured 17, including 4 children; more than 100 homes were affected along with businesses, warehouses, offices, cars, and critical infrastructure.
- [On February 24](#), airstrikes hit a village in the Zaporizhzhia district, destroying residential buildings and killing four people, while two others, including a child, were injured.

March 2026

In March 2026, civilian casualties in Ukraine rose sharply, with at least **211 people killed and 1,206 injured** - a 49% increase compared to February and 29% higher than March 2025, marking the highest monthly toll since July 2025. Long-range missile and drone attacks remained the primary driver of casualties (36%), particularly in urban areas far from the frontline, while short-range drones caused the highest number of deaths and were the leading cause of harm near the frontline, alongside artillery and aerial bombs, which together accounted for 63% of casualties.¹⁴

- [On March 2](#), Russian attacks across Ukraine killed 9 people and injured 19, with strikes hitting Kherson, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia, Sumy, and Kharkiv oblasts, damaging homes, infrastructure, and leaving multiple civilians wounded, including children.

¹⁴ [Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict — March 2026 | UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine](#)

- [On 3 March](#), Russian attacks on Zaporizhzhia, Sumy, Kherson, Donetsk, and Kharkiv oblasts killed 3 people and injured 35, with hundreds of strikes damaging residential buildings, cars, and civilian infrastructure across multiple settlements.
- [On the night of 7 March](#), a Russia used its newly deployed “Izdeliye-30” missile in a large-scale strike, hitting a five-story residential building in Kharkiv. One entrance section was destroyed from top to bottom, while nearby homes, a school, and cars were also damaged. The attack occurred while residents were asleep, causing fires and a full structural collapse. 11 civilians, including 2 children, were killed, and 15–16 others were injured, among them several children. Search and rescue teams worked for days to clear rubble and search for survivors.
- [On 14 March](#), a massive Russian attack on the Kyiv region killed five people and injured 22. Strikes damaged 37 private houses, 59 apartment buildings, and 23 vehicles, along with schools, a kindergarten, a vocational training institution, warehouse facilities, stores, and a religious building.
- [On the morning of 20 March](#), a Russian drone struck a Proliska humanitarian mission evacuation vehicle in Oleksiievo-Druzhkivka, Donetsk Oblast, killing two women (aged 83 and 63) and injuring three others, including evacuees in critical condition. The drone hit the top of the vehicle near the humanitarian emblem, underscoring Russia’s disregard for international humanitarian law and the extreme risks faced by civilian evacuation teams.
- [On 23–24 March](#) 2026, Russia launched nearly 1,000 drones in one of the largest aerial assaults of the war, killing 7 people and injuring at least 50. The rare daytime wave of over 550 kamikaze drones struck central and western Ukraine, hitting Lviv (32 injured, UNESCO-listed Bernardine Monastery damaged), Ivano-Frankivsk (2 killed, 4 injured including a child, maternity hospital damaged), Vinnytsia (1 killed, 13 injured), Zhytomyr (12-year-old girl injured, residential damage), Khmelnytskyi (1 injured, power outages), and Ternopil (energy facilities damaged, 70,000 without electricity). The attacks underscored Russia’s shift in tactics, aiming to overwhelm air defenses and inflict widespread civilian and infrastructure damage.
- [On the night of 27–28 March](#), Russian UAV struck the roof of Odesa Maternity Hospital No. 5, igniting a fire and destroying wards where mothers and newborns stayed. At the time, there were 32 patients, 22 babies, and 27 medical staff inside. Thanks to a rapid evacuation, including moving twins on mechanical ventilation to a shelter equipped with neonatal intensive care, no casualties were reported. Doctors themselves fought the blaze before firefighters arrived, with one physician even battling flames on the roof.

The actual extent of civilian harm – both casualties and infrastructure damage - is likely considerably higher as many reports of civilian harm, have not been possible to verify due to the lack of access to areas near frontline and to the occupied territories. Incidents that occurred in Russian territory have not been mentioned due to a lack of credible sources verification.

The vast majority **98 percent of casualties** reported between January and March 2026 occurred **in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. Civilians were killed or injured across 19 regions of Ukraine** and the city of Kyiv.¹⁵

Our Call to Action

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) reiterates its strong condemnation of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, humanitarian and medical workers, and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and energy facilities. We denounce the widespread and repeated use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, which inflict devastating harm on civilians and flagrantly violate international humanitarian law (IHL). Such attacks likely constitute breaches of the principles of distinction, proportionality, and feasible precautions.

HI calls on all governments to urgently endorse and fully implement the [Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#), and to uphold their commitments to restrict and refrain from such use when civilian harm is foreseeable.

We further urge the international community to condemn and investigate violations of IHL, to strengthen accountability mechanisms, and to ensure survivor-centered assistance, including mental health support and inclusive rehabilitation services. Protecting civilians and safeguarding essential services must remain a global priority, and states that have already signed the Declaration should lead by example, sharing concrete measures taken to implement its commitments and demonstrating genuine action to reduce civilian harm.

¹⁵ [Protection of civilians | UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine](#)