

Ukraine: NGOs statement on the devastating consequences of constant bombing and shelling on civilians

As the war in Ukraine enters its fourth year since the full-scale invasion in February 2022, civilians continue to pay the higher price. The ongoing ceasefire talks illustrate the absence of consideration for the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and medical personnel. The missile attack on 24 March in Sumy, which caused more than 100 casualties, nearly a quarter of them children, is the latest illustration of the disproportionate impact of this conflict on civilians.

Since February 2022, at least 42 505 civilians have been killed or injured while the first months of 2025 saw an intensification of bombing and shelling. The widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas and ensuing civilian suffering and destruction to infrastructure has resulted in one of the biggest humanitarian emergencies in Europe with 12.7 million people in need of humanitarian aid.

This statement aims to highlight major incidents where civilians have been harmed by the extensive use of explosive weapons in populated areas from both parties to the conflicts and document the type of explosive weapons that pose the greatest threat to civilian life. Although, the vast majority (94%) of reported civilian casualties and damage to education and health facilities occurred in territory controlled by Ukraine¹.

Certain types of weapons pose an extremely serious threat to civilians, with disastrous consequences like the widespread use of drones and the disproportionate use of ballistic missiles in populated areas.

In January solely, drones caused 27% of civilian deaths and 30% of injuries. Drones are **above all dangerous for civilian when used in populated areas, terrorizing the population in their daily habits, when they are walking in the streets and impeding their access to schools, hospitals and even to their homes. Drones are also the biggest risk to first responders when carrying out evacuations and delivering humanitarian aid along the frontline with humanitarian vehicles being directly targeted.**

¹ [OHCHR - Protection of civilians in armed conflict Ukraine January 2025](#)

- Loitering munitions, (or “suicide drones”), such as the Iranian “Shahed” are massively used by Russian Federation since 2022.² Designed to self-destruct on impact, they are hard to detect due to low radar signature and low altitude flight.³
- Short-range drones, equipped with “first-person-view” (FPV) providing real-time visuals to operators are theoretically more precise and better suited to distinguishing military targets from civilians. However, increasing civilian casualties from short-range drones raise serious concerns about compliance with fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, especially principle of distinction and precaution⁴.

In addition to drones, the use of missiles, cruise or ballistic ones, poses an even greater threat, often leaving civilians with less than three minutes to seek shelter. **Their wide impact radius is likely to cause important direct and indirect damage to civilians and civilians object when used in populated areas, violating the principle of proportionality under international humanitarian law.**

- The Iskander-K is a cruise missile that can carry conventional warheads weighing up to 480kg or can be equipped with cluster munitions.
- The KH-22 cruise missiles can carry a conventional warhead weighing up to 900kg.
- The Iskander-M, a tactical, short-range ballistic missile can carry conventional warheads weighing up to 700kg.
- Other missile systems like the Kh-47M2 hypersonic missile pose similar threats to civilians due to their high speed and destructive potential.

When explosive weapons are used in populated areas their effects are devastating, injuring and killing civilians, as well as destroying vital civilian infrastructure and provision of services that they depend on. ⁵ While explosive weapons are inherently indiscriminate, their impact varies across different groups ⁶ **pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. Women, children,**

² [https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/WEG/Asset/Shahed-136_Iranian_Loitering_Munition_Unmanned_Aerial_Vehicle_\(UAV\)](https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/WEG/Asset/Shahed-136_Iranian_Loitering_Munition_Unmanned_Aerial_Vehicle_(UAV))

³ <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/DRONES/dwpkeyjwkpm/>

⁴ <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/In-Ukraine-Short-Range-Drones-Become-Most-Dangerous-Weapon-for-Civilians-UN-Human-Rights-Monitors-Say>

⁵ https://www.hi.org/sn_uploads/document/Report-Healthcare-access-in-EWIPA-settings-FINAL-022025.pdf

persons with disabilities, and older individuals are among the groups most profoundly affected, as they are the ones who have the most difficulty finding shelter in a timely manner in the event of air raids. Notably, children are seven times more likely than adults to die from blast-related injuries⁷.

In this collective statement, we, NGOs delivering humanitarian aid in Ukraine, **strongly denounce the continuous use of explosive weapons against civilians and civilian infrastructure**. We call:

- Both parties to the conflict to:
 - **Stop the use of explosive weapons with wide area effect on populated areas and facilitate** rapid, safe and unhindered **humanitarian access to all territories where people are in dire need of aid.**
- The international community:
 - Use all the necessary means to apply Article 1 of the Geneva Convention and to **condemn, investigate and prosecute violations to IHL**, including the violation of the principles of distinction and proportionality, the rule on feasible precautions, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, the attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including attacks on health and educational facilities.

*Find below the list of major explosive weapons incidents impacting civilians from January to March 2025.*⁸

January 2025:

At least 139 civilians were killed and 738 injured in Ukraine in January 2025, a 39% increase from December 2024. **During this month, drones caused more casualties than any other weapon in Ukraine**⁹.

- On 3 January¹⁰, at least two aerial bombs hit a residential area and a cemetery in the southeastern part of Sloviansk City, injuring four civilians, including one child. Additionally, three ballistic missiles were launched at Chernihiv city. As a result of the

⁷ https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/explosive-weapons-and-the-children-and-armed-conflict-agenda_final_digital.pdf

⁸ The list below is not exhaustive and does not capture all incidents that occurred between January and March 2025. The attacks mentioned were chosen due to their significant impact on civilian lives and infrastructure.

⁹ <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/In-Ukraine-Short-Range-Drones-Become-Most-Dangerous-Weapon-for-Civilians-UN-Human-Rights-Monitors-Say>

¹⁰ INSO report and article from the Kyiv Independent

attack, one civilian died; four civilians sustained injuries, two private houses damaged and windows of seven houses were broken.

- On [8 January](#), two aerial glide bombs struck an industrial facility in Zaporizhzhia city, killing 14 civilians and injuring 115, making it one of the attacks with the highest number of casualties since 24 February 2022.
- On [15 January](#), another large-scale, coordinated attack with cruise missiles on energy infrastructure damaged four gas production, transportation and storage facilities in three regions of Ukraine. The attack also resulted in emergency power outages in seven regions, and damage to housing and property.
- On [17 January](#), two ballistic missiles struck an education building and a residential area within a short interval in Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk region), killing four women and a man and injuring at least seven civilians.
- On [18 January](#)¹¹, two Iskander ballistic missiles were launched toward Kyiv throughout the night. The interception of one of the missiles at low altitude led to the falling wreckage causing extensive damage in the city and at least four civilians killed and six others injured.
- On [20 January](#), a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) strike killed three people and injured 24 in the occupied village of Bekhtery (Kherson region)¹².
- On [23 January](#), an attack in Zaporizhzhia city, with five loitering munitions and four ballistic missiles, killed a man and injured 49 civilians. On [30 January](#), a 81 loitering munitions attack significantly damaged a residential building in Sumy city, killing 11 civilians and injuring at least four including one child. The attack caused the deaths of three family couples, all of whom were over 60 years old.

February 2025

At least 123 civilians were killed and 567 injured in Ukraine in February 2025. **Despite the threat it poses to civilians, the extensive use of drones also serves to saturate airspace and air defense, implanting fear and anxiety among the population.**

- On [1 February](#)¹³, at night, Russian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone and missile strike across Ukraine, launching seven Iskander-M ballistic missiles, 26 cruise missiles and 123 Shahed drones. The attack damaged a residential building in Poltava city, killing 15 civilians (including eight women, and three children) and injuring 18

¹¹ INSO report and article from RBC Ukraine

¹² HRMMU has verified 7 of these casualties, while the others, as well as the circumstances of the attack, are pending verification.

¹³ INSO report and UN Protection of civilians in armed conflict – February 2025

(including nine women and four children), making it the attack with the highest number of casualties in the city since 24 February 2022. Additionally, a dozen civilians in Kharkiv, Odesa and Zaporizhzhia cities were impacted.

- On [4 February](#), a missile struck an administrative building in the centre of Izium (Kharkiv region), killing 6 civilians and injuring 55 (47 women and three children).
- On [28 February](#), a loitering munitions attack damaged at least two medical facilities in Kharkiv city, resulting in the evacuation of at least 55 patients of the psychoneurological facility, including elderly people with low mobility

March 2025:

In March, talks on the possibility of a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia did not affect the levels of incidents impacting civilians, as figures of explosive weapons in populated areas recorded in Ukraine in March are consistent with those in February and the use of disproportionate weapons is verified.

- On 2 March¹⁴ loitering munitions impacted residential buildings and vehicles in Kyivskiy District, resulting in eight civilians injured, including a six-year-old child.
- On [6 March](#)¹⁵, a missile strike on a hotel in Kryvyi Rih city killed four civilians and injured 32 others, including two children. Additionally, 14 apartments, a post office, a community center and shops were damaged in the immediate vicinity. This strike is the first direct hit on a hotel in Kryvyi Rih in 2025, but the fourth since last August. According to the authorities, both Ukrainian and foreign humanitarian personnel were at the hotel at the time of the attack.
- During [the night between 6 and 7 March](#)¹⁶, a complex countrywide attack occurred on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Russian Federation launched 67 missiles - involving at least eight cruise missiles, seven ballistic missiles, and over 194 loitering munitions. In the morning of [7 March](#)¹⁷, one Iskander-M ballistic missile struck a residential district of Kharkiv city, injuring at least eight civilians and damaging about 30 houses.
- On [11 March](#), Ukraine launched a massive attack on Russian's oil refinery, with at least 91 drones in Moscow's region and 240 directed at other targets across the country. The attack resulted in the death of three civilian and 18 injured.

¹⁴ INSO report

¹⁵ INSO report and article from Kyiv Post

¹⁶ INSO report and article from New York Times

¹⁷ INSO report and article from Kharkiv local media

- On [13 March](#)¹⁸, two ballistic missiles struck a restaurant and an administrative building in Kryvyi Rih city, injuring 14 civilians (including two children and four women) and damaging residential buildings, education facilities, a sports facility, shops, a pharmacy and vehicles.
- On [19 March](#)¹⁹, 21 loitering munitions were launched in Kropyvnytskyi city, damaging multiple residential buildings and railway infrastructure. 10 civilians were injured because of the attack, including four children.
- On [21 March](#)²⁰, a loitering munition attack in Zaporizhzhia city hit a kinder garden building and a restaurant resulted in three civilians killed (one woman and one child among them) and 16 others injured.
- On 24 March²¹, a ballistic missile struck an industrial facility next to three schools in a residential area of Sumy city, injuring 101 civilians among them 23 children. , a ballistic missile struck an industrial facility next to three schools in a residential area of Sumy city, injuring 101 civilians among them 23 children.
- On 30 March²², loitering munitions struck a residential area of Kharkiv city, to civilians were killed and 55 injured, including five children.

Signatories: Halo Trust Ukraine, Humanity & Inclusion – Handicap International, Mission Kharkiv, Nonviolent Peaceforce Ukraine, Oxfam, Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), Triangle Génération Humanitaire (TGH)

¹⁸ INSO report and article from United 24 media

¹⁹ INSO report and article from the Kyiv Independent

²⁰ INSO report and article from the Kyiv Independent

²¹ INSO report and article from BBC

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/30/ukraine-war-briefing-kyiv-accuses-russia-of-war-after-attack-on-military-hospital-in-kharkiv>