



Ukraine: Handicap International's (HI) statement on the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the rising civilian toll (April - June 2026)

On the fifth year of full-scale war in Ukraine, the humanitarian crisis remains severe, driven by relentless attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. Between April and June 2026, explosive attacks carried out in populated areas in Ukraine and the Russian Federation reached an **unprecedented level of violence against civilians**.

Deadliest months for civilians

Over this period, the UN recorded a peak in Ukraine **in June, with at least 293 civilians killed and 1,990 injured** – more than 2,000 victims in a single month, the deadliest one since February 2022. In May¹, Ukrainian strikes in Russia and the territories under Russian control also caused civilian casualties with 47 deaths and 298 injuries, including 21 deaths and 44 injuries in a strike on Starobilsk (Luhansk oblast).

These figures reflect an extremely worrying trend of deteriorating conditions for the civilian population, with a **rise of more than 20 per cent in the number of casualties between January–April 2026 and the same period in 2025** (815 civilians killed and 4,174 injured, compared with 682 killed and 3,453 injured), before a further escalation in the spring. This intensification of hostilities has resulted in increased and repeated use of explosive weapons in populated areas, striking towns and cities far from the front line – notably Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Kharkiv and Kherson – as well as the territories under Russian control and the Russian Federation, where residential neighborhoods, schools and essential infrastructure are directly affected, with devastating consequences for civilians.

United Nations data confirm that long-range explosive weapons – in particular missiles with wide area effect and drones – are the main means employed, and therefore the primary sources of harm to civilian populations. Between April and June, those weapons were responsible for over 40 per cent of civilian casualties.

In May, the intensive use of drones resulted in at least 64 civilian deaths and 539 injuries in Ukraine, reaching a level not seen since the start of the invasion, as part of attacks combining missile salvos

¹ <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2026/05/1158897>

– including hypersonic ballistic missiles – and drones against densely populated areas in Kyiv and Starobilsk in Ukraine as well as the Russian regions of Belgorod and Samara.

Between January and June 2026, the number of civilian casualties rise to 9,374 with 1,396 killed and 7,978 injured.

Overall, the **civilian toll in Ukraine since February 2022 has risen to 65,044 killed or injured, underscoring the devastating impact of indiscriminate assaults on civilians and the urgent need for strengthened humanitarian protection.**

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 territories under Russian control.

Most destructive weapons for civilians

Russian forces use of explosive weapons is resulting in a pattern of harm for civilians. Ukrainian forces are also using a combination of different type of explosive weapons – even though the scale of verified induced civilian harm on Russian territory or area under Russian control is not reaching the same level.

Loitering Munitions (Shahed-136/131, FP-1 long range drone, Bar)

- [Russia launched](#) **thousands of Shahed drones** in coordinated waves, often at night, deliberately targeting Ukraine’s energy grid and residential areas.
- In **April 2026 alone**, Russia deployed **6,722 drones and missiles**, the highest figure since the full-scale invasion began. Of these, **6,583 were long-range drones**, 91 cruise missiles, and 48 ballistic missiles.
- Attacks caused prolonged blackouts and heating outages, with **14 strikes on Odesa seaport infrastructure** disrupting civilian shipping and humanitarian deliveries.
- Ukraine forces intensified long-range drones strikes deep into Russian territories disrupting energy infrastructures.

Short-Range Drones (FPV, Lancet-type, Hornet)

- 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 persons with disabilities, as drones pursued victims in real time and struck ambulances.
- Short-range drones killed or injured in May and June 2026 more civilians than in any other months since the start of the full-scale invasion, with 153 killed and 1127 injured combined.

Aerial Bombs (Glide and Unguided)

- Russia's use of glide bombs remained at record levels, with **thousands dropped monthly** on residential areas in Kharkiv and Donetsk.
- On **3 April 2026**, an aerial bombardment of Kramatorsk (Donetsk oblast) killed **4 civilians**, including a 16-year-old boy, and injured 4 others. FAB-250 bombs with cluster munitions were used, damaging homes and administrative buildings. Local prosecutors are investigating the attack as a possible war crime.

Cruise and Ballistic Missiles (Kh-101, Iskander-M, Kalibr, Zircon, Neptune, FP-5 Flamingo)

- On June 2 and June 15, Russia launched its largest ballistic and hypersonic missile attack of the year with around 70 missiles. The attacks killed multiple civilians, including five in residential buildings, and injured many, including children.
- As of [July 2026](#), five Neptune missile strikes against facilities linked to Russia's military-industrial complex have been verified.

The combined use of Shahed drones, FPV drones, glide bombs and cruise/ballistic missiles have a devastating impact on civilians especially on the most vulnerable, children, persons with disabilities, women and elderly causing widespread damage to civilian infrastructure, schools, hospitals and other medical facilities impeding access to essential services. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is likely to result in international humanitarian law violations regarding fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions.

Main incidents involving civilian casualties

The following chronology highlights the most devastating attacks in Ukraine and Russia or territories under Russian control impacting civilians from January to March, underscoring urgent protection needs and accountability gaps²

Incidents that occurred in Russian territory have not been detailed extensively due to a lack of credible sources verification.

April 2026

- [On 3 April](#), Russia carried out a massive daytime attack on Ukraine, deploying over **542 drones** (including about **330 Shahed-type**), **25 Kh-101 cruise missiles**, **10 Iskander-M ballistic missiles**, and **2 Iskander-K cruise missiles**, supported by strategic bombers and a MiG-31 fighter jet, killing at least **4 civilians** and injuring more than **30**. Casualties were reported in **Kyiv Oblast** (1 dead, 8 injured, including a child), **Kharkiv** (2 dead, 7 injured), **Zhytomyr Oblast** (1 woman killed, 10 injured), and **Sumy Oblast** (1 woman killed, several injured, including a 17-year-old girl).

² The list below is not exhaustive and does not capture all incidents that occurred between April and June 2026. The attacks mentioned were chosen due to their significant impact on civilian lives and infrastructure.

- **On 4 April**, Russian forces struck a market in **Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk region)**, killing **five civilians** and injuring **27**, including a 14-year-old girl.
- **On 7 April**, Russian forces used **176 drones**. The attacks **killed 13 people and injured 77**, with residents of Nikopol³, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Sumy, and Chernihiv regions suffering the most.
- **On 13 April**, Russian forces attacked **24 settlements in Kharkiv region**, killing **one woman and injuring 20 civilians**. Strikes involved missiles, guided bombs, and multiple types of drones, damaging homes, apartment buildings, vehicles, farms, businesses, and railway infrastructure.
- On the night of **16 April**, Russia carried out one of the deadliest mass strikes of the year, launching **19 ballistic missiles, 25 cruise missiles, and 659 drones** against Ukraine. At least **17 civilians were killed and over 100 injured** in **Kyiv, Odesa, and Dnipro**, with homes, apartment buildings, offices, warehouses, and port facilities destroyed or set ablaze. In Kyiv, four people died (including a 12-year-old child) and 48 were injured; in Odesa, nine were killed and 23 wounded; and in Dnipro, four were killed and 34 injured. Debris from interceptions also damaged residential areas, while survivors described the sudden devastation in neighborhoods previously considered safe.
- On the night of **24 April**, Russian drone and missile strike hit residential buildings in **Odesa**, **killing an elderly couple** (both 75 years old) and injuring **15 civilians**, eight of whom were hospitalized.
- On **25 April**, Russian forces carried out prolonged missile and drone strikes on **Dnipro and surrounding districts**, leaving **eight civilians dead and 56 injured**, including several children. The attacks lasted over 20 hours, repeatedly hitting residential areas, businesses, and infrastructure. Rescue workers recovered bodies from a destroyed four-storey building, while additional casualties were reported in the **Nikopol** and **Synelnykove** districts, where children as young as one and four were among the wounded. Later in the evening, another strike injured ten more people in Dnipro, including two boys aged 11 and 14.
- Between **25 and 30 April**, **at least 5 attacks on port infrastructure in Odesa** region resulted in damage to critical civilian infrastructure facilities and disruption to their operation.

May 2026

- **On 4 May**, a missile attack in **Merefa**, Kharkiv region, struck residential areas, **killing 9 civilians** (6 men and 3 women) and **injuring 28** (13 women, 12 men, and 3 boys).
- **On 5 May**, in **Poltava** region, missiles and loitering munitions struck a gas production facility. A second strike on the same location killed and injured emergency responders who had arrived at the scene. In total, **5 civilians, including 2 emergency workers, were killed, and 32 civilians, including 23 emergency workers, were injured**.
- **On 5 May**, Russian forces carried out **guided aerial bomb strikes** on Zaporizhzhia, hitting industrial and residential areas. The attack killed **12 civilians** and injured at least **37–42 others**, with victims ranging in age from 23 to 68. Rescue workers pulled people from the rubble, though one man later died in hospital. Fires broke out at a vehicle service station and nearby enterprises, while police reported that Russian drones targeted the scene during emergency response efforts.

³ https://x.com/OCHA_Ukraine/status/2041497218322960410

- **On 5 May**, Russian forces struck the **center of Kramatorsk (Donetsk region)** with **three high-explosive aerial bombs**, directly hitting civilian areas, **killing 7** civilians (4 women and 3 men) and **injuring 19** (10 men and 9 women).
- **On 5 May**, a missile attack in Dnipro struck a warehouse belonging to a supermarket chain, killing 4 men and injuring 19 civilians (15 men and 4 women).
- **On 14 May**, a missile and loitering munition attack on Kyiv killed 24 civilians (11 men, 10 women, and 3 girls) and injured at least 32 (20 men, 10 women, 1 boy, and 1 girl). All of those killed and some of those injured were residents of a multi-storey building, one entrance of which collapsed following a missile strike.
- **On 19 May**, a missile struck an area near a supermarket in Pryluky, Chernihiv region, during the day, killing 4 civilians (2 men, 1 woman, and 1 boy) and injuring 26 (13 men and 13 women).
- **During the night of 21-22 May**, one or more weapons, launch by Ukrainian forces struck an educational complex in Starobilsk, Luhansk region (under Russian control). The strike killed 21 civilians (18 women, 3 men), many of them adult students, and injured at least 4 civilians (2 women and 2 men).
- **On 24 May**, a missile and loitering munition attack on Kyiv killed 2 women and injured at least 70 civilians (35 men, 32 women, 2 girls, and 1 boy).

June 2026

- **On June 2**, missile and loitering munition attacks on Dnipro and Kyiv killed 23 civilians (8 men, 13 women, and 2 boys) and injured at least 109 (60 men, 42 women, 4 boys, and 3 girls).
- **On June 8**, various **Russian air strikes killed at least four civilians and injured more than 30 across Ukraine**, particularly during an attack in the center of the city of Zaporizhzhia, in south-eastern Ukraine⁴.
- **On July 16**⁵, 3 civilians were killed and five injured during Russian attacks on the town of Sloviansk, in the Donetsk Oblast, using a 'FAB-250' bomb fitted with a UMPC module, according to the regional public prosecutor's office.
- **On June 23, 5 civilians were killed and 29 injured in Russian strikes carried out in the Ukrainian oblasts** of Donetsk⁶, Kherson⁷, Kharkiv⁸, Zaporizhzhia⁹ and Dnipropetrovsk, according to local authorities.
- **On June 24**, 2 employees from an international NGO were killed while conducting demining activities in Kherson region¹⁰.

⁴ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_zp/41635#

⁵ https://t.me/Donetsk_obl_prokuratura/6076#

⁶ <https://t.me/VadymFilashkin/4380#>

⁷ <https://t.me/VadymFilashkin/4380#>

⁸ <https://t.me/synegubov/23128#>

⁹ <https://t.me/olexandrprokudin/13492#>

¹⁰ <https://folkehjelp.no/nyheter/to-drept-og-flere-skadet-i-et-rapportert-russisk-angrep-i-ukraina>

- **On June 25**, a Ukrainian drone strike led to the death of 2 civilians in Briansk region (Russia) as declared by regional authorities¹¹.
- **On June 29**, a Russian missile strike killed five civilians and injured 28 in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast¹². In Luhansk region, a drone attack killed a civilian as reported by the itinerant Russian Ambassador of foreign affairs.
- **On June 30**, 3 people were killed and 18 others injured as a result of Russian attacks in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, [according to local authorities](#)¹³.

At the same time, Ukraine intensified its strikes against Russian energy infrastructure, conducting verified drone attacks on oil refineries and gas facilities across Russia. Major facilities including Tuapse, Ust-Luga, Yaroslavl, Kuibyshev, TANECO, Moscow, NORSI, and Orenburg were hit, forcing shutdowns and sparking fires¹⁴. These operations disrupted fuel production, contributed to shortages and rising prices inside Russia, and marked a significant escalation compared to previous months.

The **vast majority of casualties** reported between April - June 2026 occurred **in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. Civilians were killed or injured across 20 regions of Ukraine** and the city of Kyiv.¹⁵

Our Call to Action

Handicap International (HI) strongly denounces the devastating harm inflicted on civilians by the bombing and shelling of towns and cities in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. [**HI calls on all parties to respect IHL and its principles to ensure the protection of civilians and protection of humanitarian and health workers at all times.**](#)

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

¹¹ https://t.me/E_V_Kovalchuk/834#

¹² https://www.lemonde.fr/international/live/2026/07/04/en-direct-guerre-en-ukraine-vladimir-poutine-a-parle-par-telephone-avec-donald-trump-des-250-ans-des-etats-unis_6716525_3210.html

¹³ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_zp/43039#

¹⁴ https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/ukraine-attacks-russian-energy-sites-what-has-been-hit-2026-06-26/?utm_source=copilot.com

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

the Declaration should lead by example, sharing concrete measures taken to implement its commitments and demonstrating genuine action to reduce civilian harm.