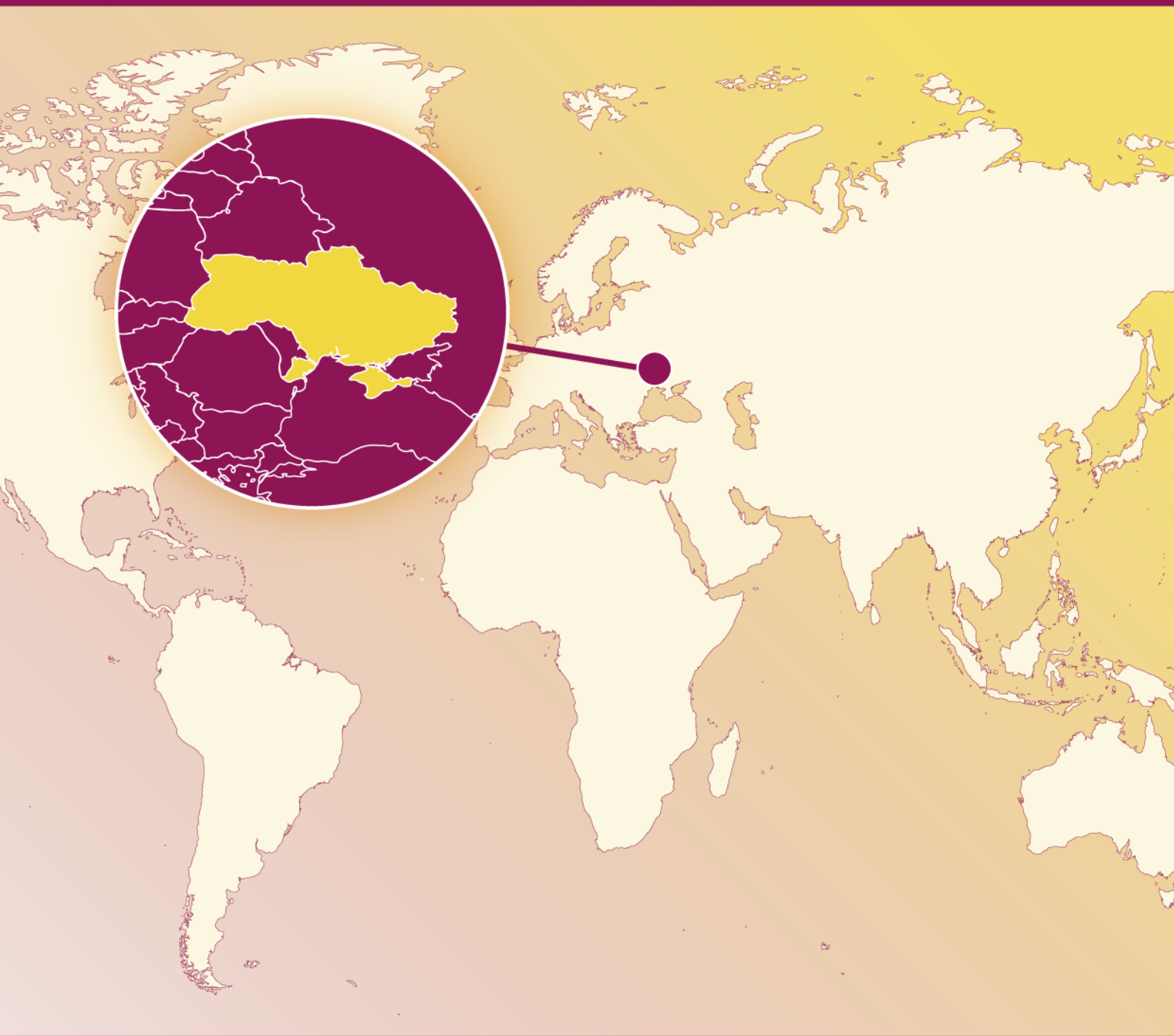


UKRAINE

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict

2022



**SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT**



**Insecurity
Insight**
Data on People in Danger

Letter from the Chair



The more than 1,900 incidents of violence against health care in war and situations of political unrest described in this report are by far the highest number documented by the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition since it began reporting a decade ago. The more than 700 assaults by Russia on health care in Ukraine are the most committed in a single year in one country.

Russia's atrocities in Ukraine have brought global attention to assaults on health care in war, highlighting pervasive violations of long-standing humanitarian norms. But in less visible conflicts and civil strife, the numbers of acts of violence and the stories behind them are equally grim: doctors imprisoned – and sometimes killed – in Myanmar and Iran for treating people in need of care; female health workers in Afghanistan harassed and sometimes beaten as they seek to provide health care for women and children; community health workers murdered in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere as they go door to door to immunize children against polio and other infectious diseases.

In the face of the profound harms communities and health workers endure from this violence, the international community has long been passive, even ignoring commitments it has made to prevent attacks and hold perpetrators to account. Impunity for the violence has continued, and even the tracking of attacks has faltered. The World Health Organization's (WHO) system for collecting and disseminating data on attacks on health care in emergencies is plagued by inadequate reporting, lack of transparency, and resistance to reform. After being criticized for reporting zero attacks in Ethiopia despite evidence of looting or damage to hospitals and health centers during the conflict in Tigray, the WHO removed Ethiopia from its public dashboard on attacks on health care.

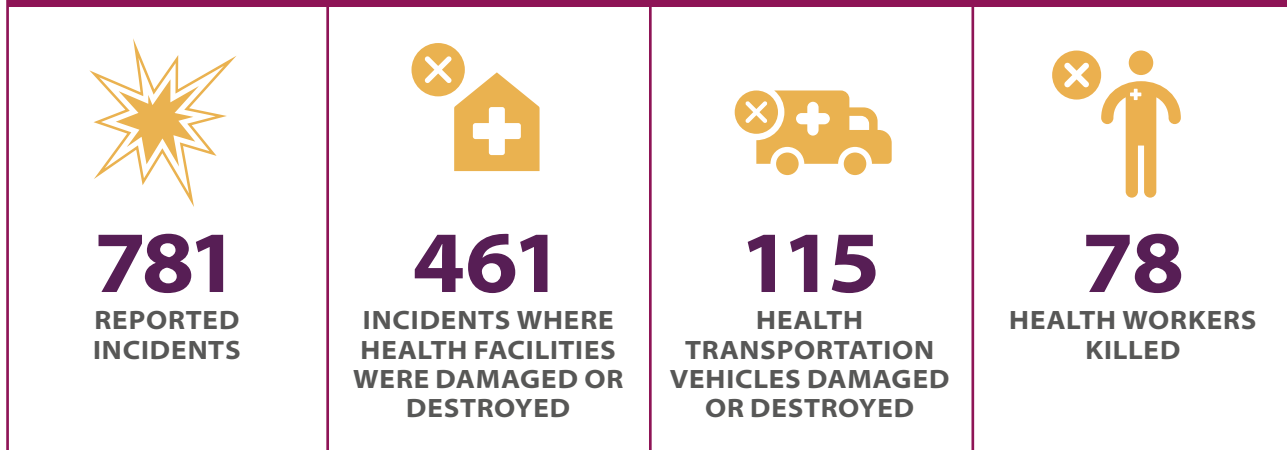
If we mobilize, however, the war in Ukraine could prove an inflection point. Never have calls for accountability for attacks on health care been as loud and sustained as now. We have an opportunity to press for justice for the people of Ukraine in the face of these atrocities and to extend that demand to people everywhere. The time for accountability for these devastating assaults on health care throughout the world is *now*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Len Rubenstein". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition



REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



↓ Source: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 781 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Ukraine in 2022.¹ In these incidents, 78 health workers were killed and health facilities were damaged on at least 461 occasions, undermining health care providers' ability to maintain safe staffing levels to effectively meet patient needs and impacting the population's access to health care. This factsheet is based on the dataset [2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data](#), which is available for download on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).

THE CONTEXT

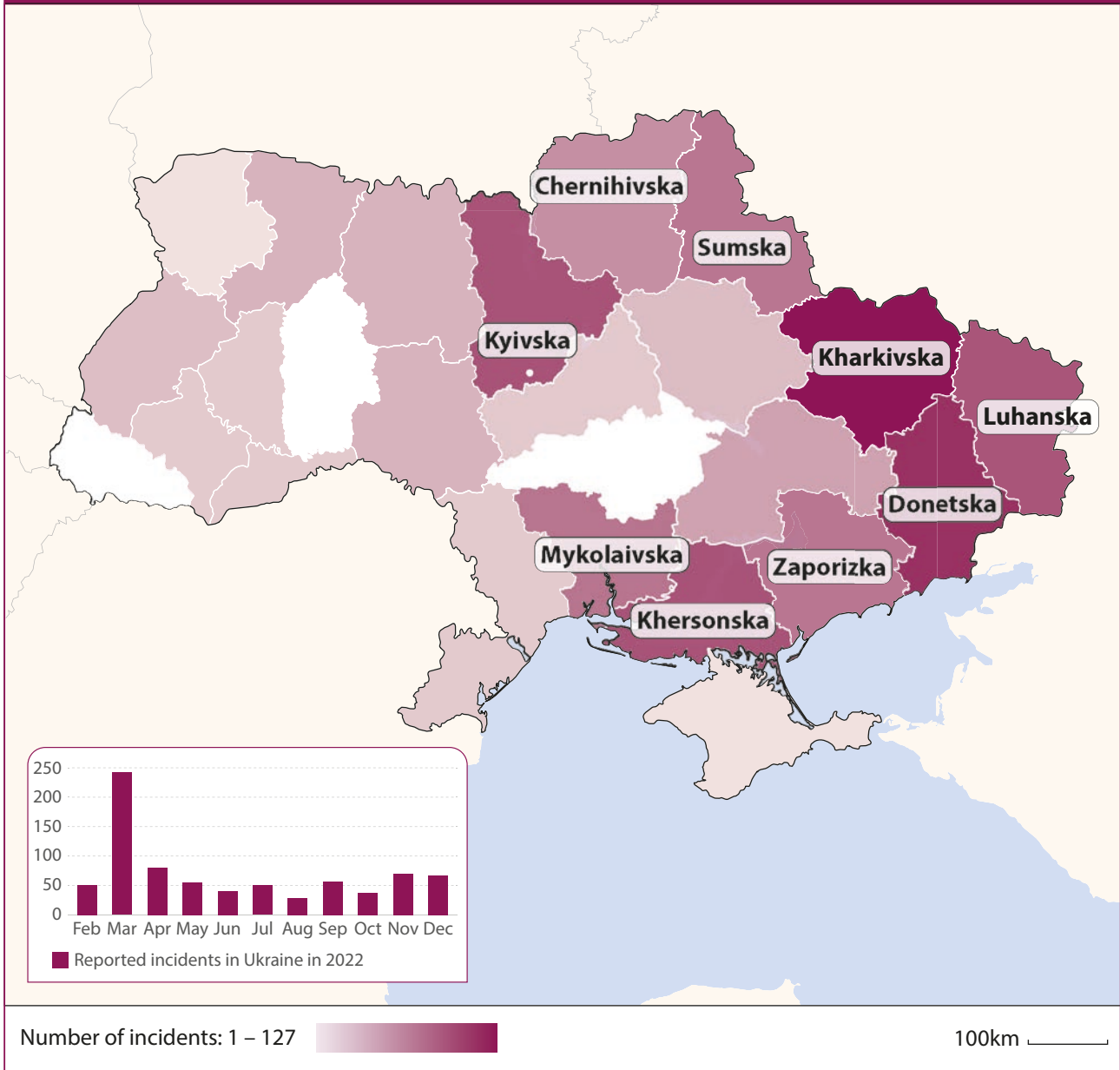
On February 24, 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While fierce fighting continues, Russian forces have claimed control over much of the eastern oblasts (administrative regions) of Donetsk, Luhanska, and Zaporizka, and also Khersonska in the south. Combined, these oblasts cover approximately a fifth of Ukraine's territory. Russian attacks have led to severe levels of civilian casualties in Ukraine and temporarily left millions without electricity, water, and heating. In the first two months of the war alone, five million Ukrainians left the country in search of refuge. By the start of 2023, 17.6 million people in Ukraine were estimated to require multisectoral humanitarian assistance.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2022

Russian forces carried out attacks on health care on an unprecedented scale in the first weeks of the invasion. During the period from February 24 to March 31, these attacks averaged almost eight each day, with almost 70% of them damaging health facilities. Moreover, violence against health care persisted throughout the year, with an average of more than two incidents recorded each day across the entire year.² Russian attacks were recorded in 22 of Ukraine's 24 oblasts, with the highest numbers reported from the Kharkivska and Donetsk oblasts in eastern Ukraine. These incidents most frequently affected Ukraine's national health system. In two incidents, Russian forces shelled the Ukrainian Red Cross Society buildings in Khersonska and Donetsk, including a hospital.³



Known location of reported incidents in Ukraine, by oblast, 2022



HEALTH FACILITIES DAMAGED OR DESTROYED

Clinics, health warehouses, hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies sustained damage at least 279 times in 2022, affecting approximately 11% of all of Ukraine's 2,500 hospitals. Russian Federation military forces were the most commonly named perpetrators of incidents of violence.⁴ Russian attacks that damaged or destroyed health facilities occurred most frequently in eastern Ukraine, with attacks reported in the oblasts of Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Luhanska, as well as Kherson in the south and in the capital, Kyiv. In Mariupol, in the southern part of Donetsk almost eight out of ten points of health care service provision (i.e. sites where medical assistance is provided) were either damaged or destroyed.⁵



Russian forces fired missiles with poor precision and accuracy at cities and towns, damaging and destroying civilian infrastructure indiscriminately through the high-explosive warheads' wide-area effects in many other incidents.⁶ In at least one case in Bashtanka, Mykolaivska oblast, the evidence points at Russian forces using a precision-guided missile against a hospital.⁷ In addition, Russian forces used tanks and other types of armed vehicles to shoot at hospitals from relatively short distances. Russian air strikes damaged or destroyed health facilities and infrastructure on 47 occasions, with over half occurring during the first weeks of the full-scale invasion. Russian air strikes were also documented during the rest of the year, mostly in eastern Ukraine. There is strong evidence of cluster munitions having affected hospitals in at least two cases – in Mykolaivska oblast in February and Dnipro oblast in June 2022.⁸ Anti-personnel landmines were discovered in October inside functioning hospitals in Donetsk, Kharkivska, and Khersonska, in areas that had previously been under Russian occupation.

Multiple attacks on the same hospitals, 2022

Russian forces attacked at least 50 hospitals on multiple occasions.





Russian forces damaged or destroyed pharmacies on at least 33 occasions, over half of which occurred in March. This led to deficits of vital medical supplies for local populations seeking medicines, a situation exacerbated in several incidents by the looting of medical supplies from damaged facilities. In addition, Russian forces damaged or destroyed blood transfusion centers on at least nine occasions. In some cases, blood donors and staff were also killed or injured when the centers were struck by shelling or mortar fire.⁹

HEALTH TRANSPORT DAMAGED OR DESTROYED

At least 114 health transportation vehicles, including ambulances, were damaged or destroyed in 43 separate incidents, limiting the ability of emergency responders to reach those in need. Russian forces damaged or destroyed ambulances in the vast majority of these incidents by shelling or gunfire, often while civilians injured by earlier Russian attacks were being transported in the ambulances. Health workers were killed or injured in some of these incidents. In other cases, ambulances were damaged after driving over landmines. In one incident in Kharkivska in October, a landmine killed an ambulance driver and injured a paramedic.¹⁰

There are health centres where we go to where there's nothing, just walls . . . With no heating and no water, we turn on a generator and a heater and see our patients in such conditions.

A Ukrainian doctor, April 2023

WILL THERE EVER BE ACCOUNTABILITY?

Protecting health care is a shared responsibility of all the parties to an armed conflict. International humanitarian law (IHL), which is the body of law that applies to armed conflicts, sets out detailed rules that seek to protect health care from conflict-related violence, principally by limiting the means and methods of warfare. Health care facilities, providers, and ambulances are further afforded special protection under IHL in order to mitigate the impact of conflict on their work and ensure the delivery of care to the sick and wounded. Targeting health care infrastructure and workers in an armed conflict and carrying out indiscriminate attacks that affect civilian infrastructure – including hospitals and clinics – are war crimes. When committed as part of a state policy on a widespread or systematic basis, such attacks are also crimes against humanity. There is a pressing need to ensure accountability when these crimes are committed.

The Physicians for Human Rights report *Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia's Assault on Ukraine's Health Care System* provides 10 detailed case studies illustrating Russia's attacks on hospitals, health care workers, and medical transport in Ukraine since February 2022.¹¹

The report explains how these attacks may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law, and require further investigation as part of a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to accountability. This includes enforcement through (1) international criminal law as set out in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (which has jurisdiction over international crimes committed in Ukraine); (2) Ukrainian criminal law; and (3) the principles of universal jurisdiction.

These three avenues are critical and complementary to ensure criminal accountability.



HEALTH SUPPLIES, EQUIPMENT, AND TRANSPORTATION LOOTED

Russian forces looted vital medicine and equipment on at least 66 occasions and stole at least 31 health transport vehicles such as ambulances. The vast majority of looting was committed across Ukraine's eastern oblasts. Russian forces looted facilities when they were withdrawing from Khersonska in November. In one incident, they stole all the medical equipment and ambulances from a Kherson city hospital.¹²

HEALTH WORKERS KILLED, ABDUCTED, OR TAKEN AS PRISONERS OF WAR

At least 78 health workers, including seven international health workers, were killed in Ukraine in 2022.¹³ Over 40% of all health worker deaths were recorded in the oblasts of Donetsk and Kharkivska, while other deaths were reported in Chernihivska, Khersonska, Kyivska, Luhanska, Vinnytska, Zaporizka, and Zhytomyrska. Health workers were killed in health facilities, at their homes, while going about their everyday activities, and while providing care to wounded persons, illustrating the range of risks health workers face in Ukraine.

In 2022, 61 health workers were abducted or imprisoned by Russian forces or people working with Russian personnel and taken as prisoners of war (POWs). Many were interrogated and beaten. For example, in March, a laboratory assistant from a Kyiv hospital had his toes amputated after Russian forces tortured him and his father and forced him to wear boots filled with water for a prolonged period. Both were released two months later in a prisoner swap.¹⁴ In April and May, 42 doctors – 19 females and 23 males – were taken as POWs from the Ilyich metallurgical plant in Donetsk. At least two – both females – were released in October.¹⁵ In one incident in Kherson, a nurse was hanged following her abduction and the theft of her belongings.¹⁶ Russian forces are still thought to hold the vast majority of these abducted health workers.

The number of health workers abducted or held as POWs could be much higher than the number given here due to the lack of verified lists confirming this information.

“On the day of capture, the Russian military went around all the floors, making doctors and medical personnel face the wall. The men were stripped to the waist while Russians searched them for military symbols, gunpowder and stains on their fingers, and imprints from the use of weapons on their shoulders.

Doctor at the Regional Intensive Care Hospital in Mariupol that was occupied by Russian forces from March 12, 2022

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

In March 2023, it was estimated that over USD 2.5 billion worth of damage had been caused to medical facilities in Ukraine. In some of the areas most affected, such as Mariupol, approximately 80% of health infrastructure was destroyed.¹⁷ This devastation comes at a time when the provision of health care could not be more important. Tens of thousands of civilians have been injured in the fighting, and hospital admissions, procedures, and encounters in Ukraine increased by 11.1% in 2022 compared to 2021 (despite the overall reduction in the country's population due to people leaving the country for their own safety).



The impact of such destruction on access to health care was most significant in areas occupied by Russia. Corroborated reports show that patients in these regions experienced ‘severe’ access restrictions to essential treatment, facilities, and medicines, which often went unreplenished.¹⁸ Frequently, patients with chronic conditions in Russian-occupied territories were forced to go untreated for months. The full-scale Russian invasion also undermined health care access more broadly across the country. A survey of over 2,000 Ukrainians found that at the start of December 2022, 17% had insufficient access to medical services and medicines, often due to their reduced affordability following price rises. Another recent survey found that in 32% of households, at least one family member had to stop taking medication due to the Russian invasion.

Russian assaults on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure undermined the quality of treatment health facilities can provide and increased access barriers to health care. After Russia’s retreat from Khersonska, shelling in December 2022 resulted in two-thirds of the oblast being cut off from electricity and running water, affecting the ability of health workers to use key equipment in hospitals. Surgeons, for example, were forced to use unreliable headlamps during operations. In December 2022, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine asked regional officials to consider suspending non-essential surgical operations due to the energy crisis.

*“The breathing machines don’t work, the X-ray machines don’t work ...
There is only one portable ultrasound machine.*

Doctor at a children’s hospital in Kherson

Alongside the health workers who were killed and taken as POWs, thousands have fled the country in search of safety. In total, there were 89,000 fewer health professionals in Ukraine in April 2023 than there were before the Russian invasion. Their departure further exacerbates pressures on health workers remaining in Ukraine, which in turn undermines patient care.

The Russian invasion has also had indirect impacts on vaccination programs, with vaccination rates dropping significantly. Prior to the invasion, Ukraine already had low vaccination rates, and in 2017-2019 experienced Europe’s largest measles outbreak since vaccinations against the disease had become widely available. The most notable reductions in vaccination coverage compared with 2021 were for Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), which fell by 16.9%, and hepatitis B (Hep B), which fell by 16.4%. During the first 10 months of the war, only 522,399 first doses of COVID-19 vaccination were administered in Ukraine, representing approximately 1% of the population. Reports of two measles cases at the start of March 2023 following a polio outbreak in 2022 add to concerns over the implications of low vaccination coverage.

Attacks on health care in Ukraine

This interactive map documents attacks on health care in Ukraine since the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24. It is available in English and Ukrainian and allows viewers to explore where incidents took place and what happened, including, in some cases, via photos.. This SHCC factsheet reflects data for 2022 current as of April 26, 2023, but the map and dataset will be continuously updated.



- 1 The number in the SHCC report published in May 2023 is higher than the number of 707 incidents reported in the report *Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Assault on Ukraine's Health Care System*, which was published on February 21, 2023. The number of SHCC-recorded incidents is lower than that of other organizations. On January 15, 2023, the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA) documented 767 attacks. As of April 26, 2023, the WHO SSA documented 888 attacks in Ukraine in 2022. SHCC data is continuously updated and the number of reported incidents will change as more information becomes available. For the latest updates, see *Attacks on Health Care in Ukraine* (attacksonhealthukraine.org).
- 2 This figure is an average rather than a statement that more than two attacks on health care were recorded on each day throughout this period.
- 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident numbers 36082; 36118.
- 4 Eighty-eight incidents that had not been reported elsewhere were reported by the WHO SSA. Information on the perpetrators or locations is unavailable.
- 5 Ukrainian Healthcare Center (UHC), *How Russia Destroyed Healthcare in Mariupol: A Report by the Ukrainian Healthcare Center*, January 2023. <https://uhc.org.ua/en/2023/01/04/healthcare-in-mariupol/>.
- 6 PHR, *Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia's Assault on Ukraine's Health Care System*, February 2023. <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/russias-assault-on-ukraines-health-care-system/>.
- 7 'Case study #4: Bashtanka Multiprofile Hospital (Mykolaivska oblast)', in PHR, *Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia's Assault on Ukraine's Health Care System*, February 2023, pp. 30-32. <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/russias-assault-on-ukraines-health-care-system/>.
- 8 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). *Between Enemy Lines: The Destruction of Health Care in Ukraine*, March 23, 2023. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/between-enemy-lines-destruction-health-care-ukraine>.
- 9 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 31401.
- 10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 35147.
- 11 PHR, *Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia's Assault on Ukraine's Health Care System*, February 2023. <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/russias-assault-on-ukraines-health-care-system/>.
- 12 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 35777.
- 13 At least 16 of the 78 health workers who were killed were military medics. For more information on the protected status of military medics, see <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule25#:~:text=Medical%20personnel%20exclusively%20assigned%20to,acts%20harmful%20to%20the%20enemy>.
- 14 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 32251.
- 15 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 35827.
- 16 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022 SHCC Health Care Ukraine Data. Incident number 35827.
- 17 See UHC, *How Russia Destroyed Healthcare in Mariupol: A Report by the Ukrainian Healthcare Center*, January 2022. <https://uhc.org.ua/en/2023/01/04/healthcare-in-mariupol/>.
- 18 MSF, 'War in Ukraine: MSF Reveals "Absolute" Destruction of Healthcare,' March 31, 2023. <https://msf.org.uk/article/war-ukraine-msf-reveals-absolute-destruction-healthcare>.

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators.

www.safeguardinghealth.org

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