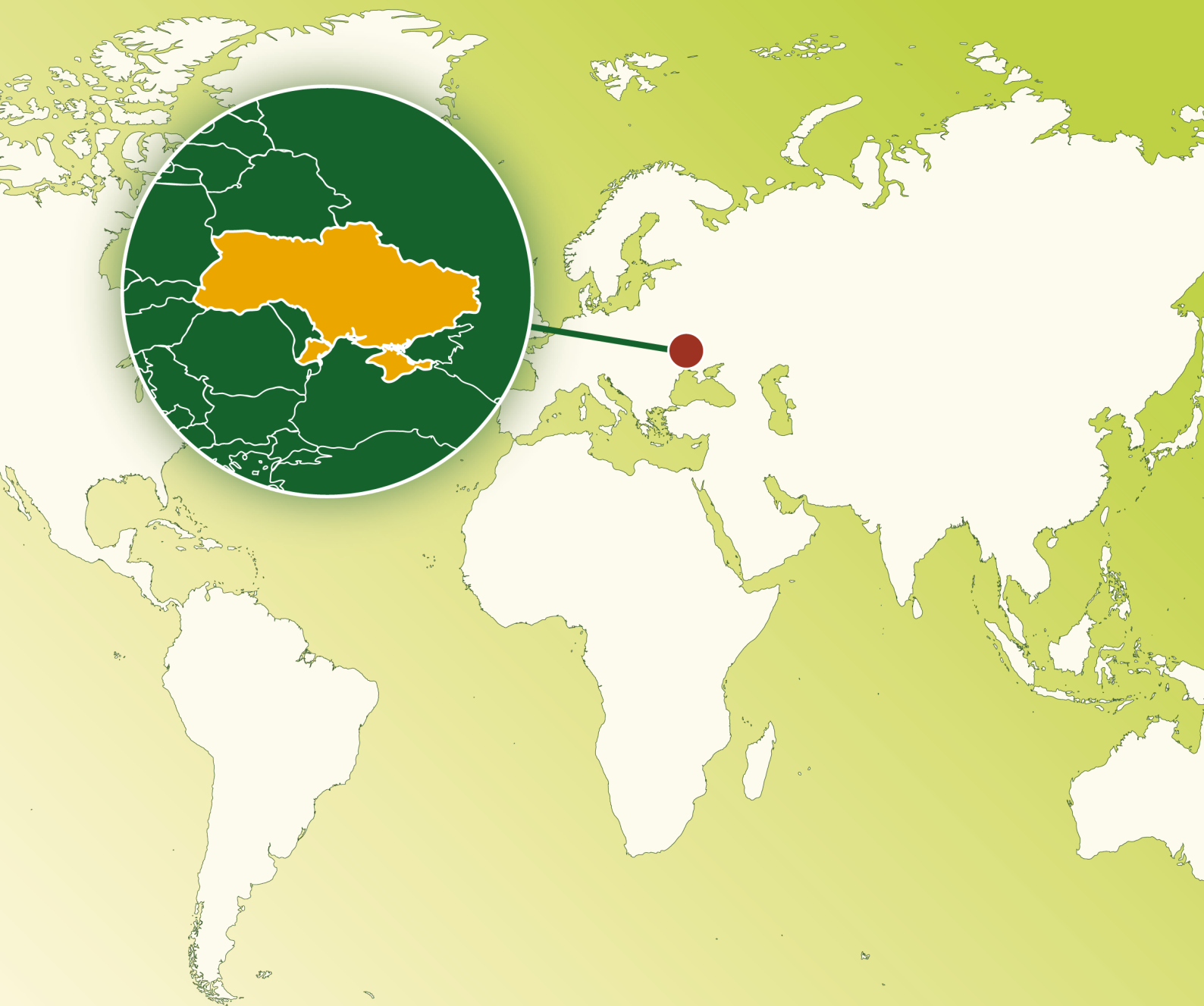


UKRAINE

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2023



Letter from the Chair



The year 2023 was a grim one for violence inflicted on health care. In 2022, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition identified the highest number of incidents since we began reporting. Yet in 2023 the number was 25% greater, exceeding 2,500.

The intensity of conflicts characterized by pervasive attacks on health care in recent years declined somewhat in 2023, including in Syria, Yemen, and the Tigray region of Ethiopia. As a result, it might also have been expected that the global trend of violence against health care would turn downward. Instead, from the first days of two new and catastrophic wars, one in Sudan and the other between Israel and Hamas, health care came under ferocious assault. In both conflicts warring parties killed health workers, attacked facilities, and destroyed health care systems. Meanwhile, attacks on health care in Myanmar and Ukraine continued at a relentless pace, in each case exceeding 1,000 since the start of the conflicts in 2021 and 2022, respectively. In many chronic conflicts, fighting forces continued to kidnap and kill health workers and loot health facilities.

At the same time, new and disturbing trends emerged. In Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gaza, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen combatants employed drones to attack health clinics, hospitals, and ambulances. In many conflicts, combatants violently entered hospitals or occupied them as sites from which to conduct military operations, leading to injuries to and the deaths of patients and staff. In many conflicts, the conduct of combatants revealed open contempt for their duty to protect civilians and health care under international humanitarian law (IHL). Israel, while purporting to abide by IHL, promoted a view of its obligations that, if accepted, would undermine the fundamental protections that IHL puts in place for civilians and health care in war.

The one consistent feature of the attacks was continued impunity for these crimes. For more than a decade, despite their repeated commitments, governments have failed to follow through on these commitments and reform their military practices, cease arms transfers to perpetrators, and bring those responsible for crimes to justice.

We need a new approach, starting with stronger leadership from UN agencies and governments willing to join with civil society and the health care community to take far more assertive action to end the scourge of violence against health care. Among other steps, they can press prosecutors domestically and internationally to bring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against health care, to develop political support for special tribunals to circumvent UN Security Council members' vetoes of referrals to the International Criminal Court, and restrict the sale of arms to forces that commit crimes.

There are some sources of hope. After years of lassitude, the World Health Organization has spoken forcefully against vicious assaults on health facilities and health workers. Civil society groups are exerting pressure to stop arms transfers to perpetrators of violence, while some militaries have launched initiatives to reduce civilian casualties in war. Leaders must build on these initiatives. Ending the suffering of millions of people depends on their doing so.

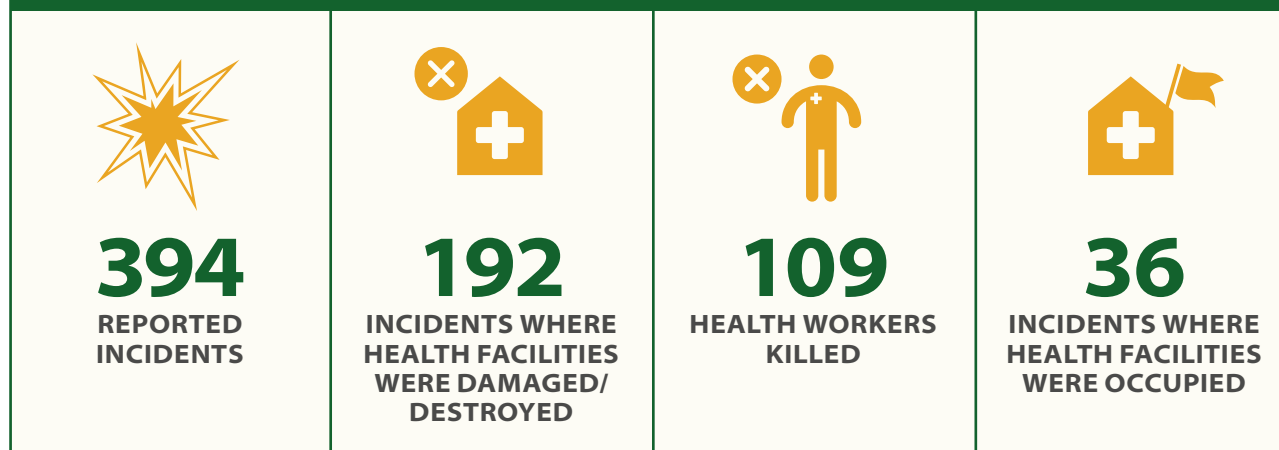
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Len Rubenstein". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

[↓ Executive Summary](#) | [Full Report](#) | [Recommendations](#) | [Methodology](#) | [Data](#)



REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



↓ Source: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 394 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Ukraine in 2023, compared to 885 in 2022. In these incidents, health facilities were damaged or destroyed on at least 192 occasions and occupied by Russian military forces 36 times. In addition, 109 health workers were killed. This factsheet is based on the dataset [2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data](#), which is available for download on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange \(HDX\)](#).

THE CONTEXT

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, fighting persisted in 2023. Russia continued to occupy almost a [fifth of Ukrainian territory](#) and inflicted high levels of civilian casualties on Ukraine's population. Large-scale damage and destruction were caused to civilian and energy infrastructure, leaving [over 12 million Ukrainians suffering from energy disruptions](#). Southwest Ukraine also experienced severe flooding [affecting over sixty thousand people](#) and [killing hundreds](#) following an explosion in June at a dam east of Kherson. About 40% of the Ukrainian population is [estimated](#) to require humanitarian assistance in 2024.

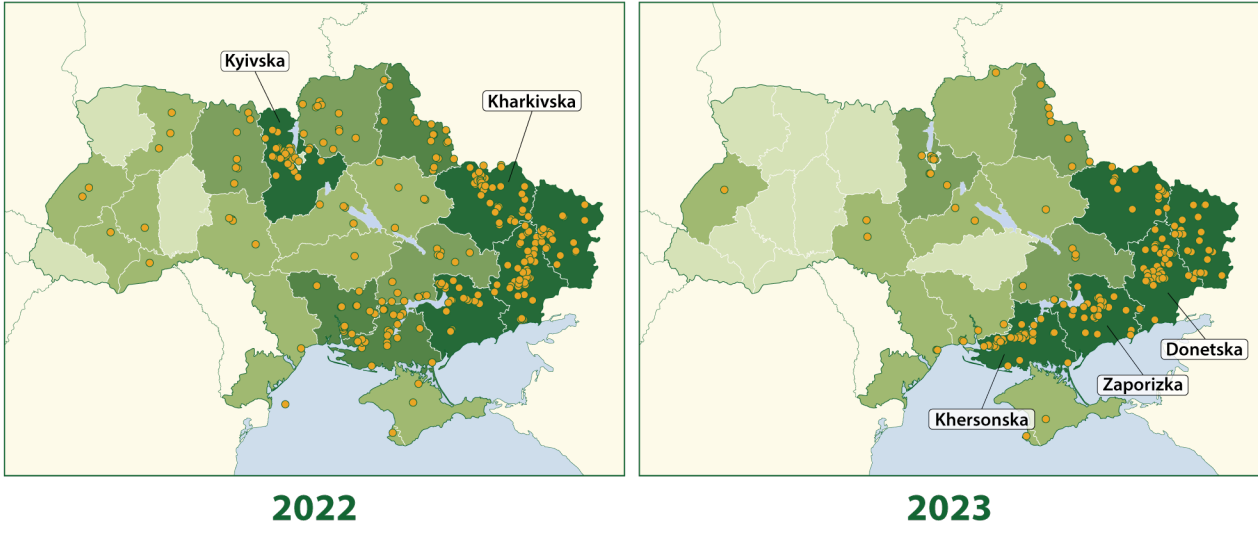
VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2023

Incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were recorded in 16 of Ukraine's 24 oblasts (regions) and Crimea, with high numbers continuing to be recorded in Donetsk and Zaporizka oblasts. Cases increased in southern Khersonska and notably decreased in Chernihivska, Kharkivska, Kyivska, Luhanska, Mykolaivska, Sumska, and Zhytomyrska oblasts. Almost two-thirds of incidents took place at health facilities, with at least 13 facilities affected by threats and violence on multiple occasions. Beryslav Central District Hospital in Khersonska was damaged on six occasions.¹ As in 2022, most incidents affected health care providers working in national health structures, with NGOs directly affected in six incidents and the Ukrainian Red Cross and the ICRC affected in four incidents.



Known locations of reported incidents affecting health care in Ukraine 2022-2023

High numbers continued to be documented in eastern Donetsk and Zaporizka oblasts in 2023 with cases increasing in southern Khersonska and decreased in Western Ukraine.

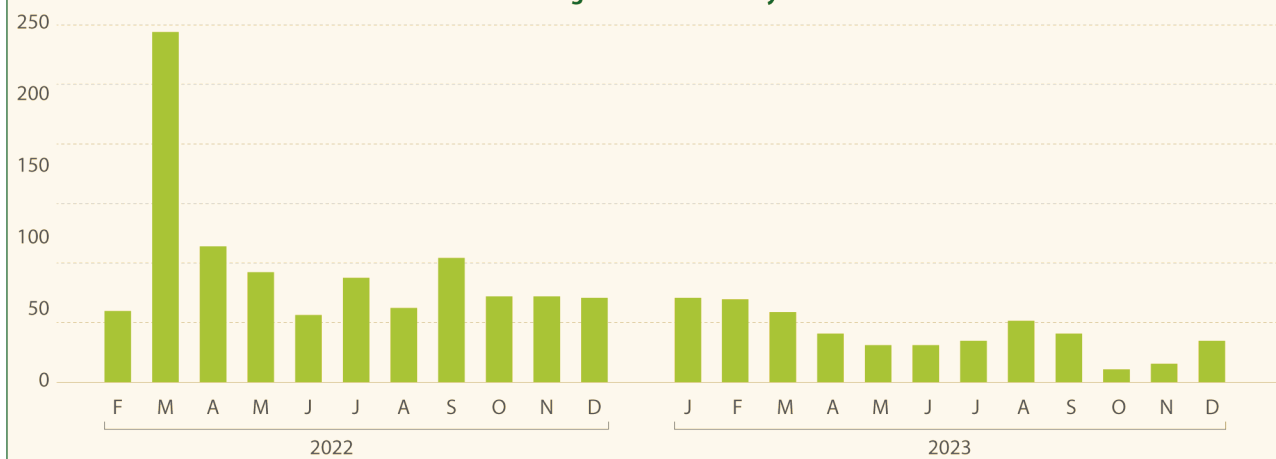


Health worker killings increased in 2023 and health facilities continued to be repurposed by Russian forces as military hospitals and used for non-medical purposes in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine. Attacks by drones armed with explosives increasingly impacted health care.

76% of incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were attributed to Russian Federation military forces. The Armed Forces of Ukraine were named on seven occasions in Donetsk, Luhanska, and Zaporizka, where hospitals occupied by Russian forces were damaged in shelling and military medics killed during fighting. In the other attacks, the attackers remained unidentified.

Violence against health care in Ukraine, February 2022-December 2023

Conflicts in which violence against health care becomes a consistent pattern, frequently starts with extreme levels of violence against the health system.

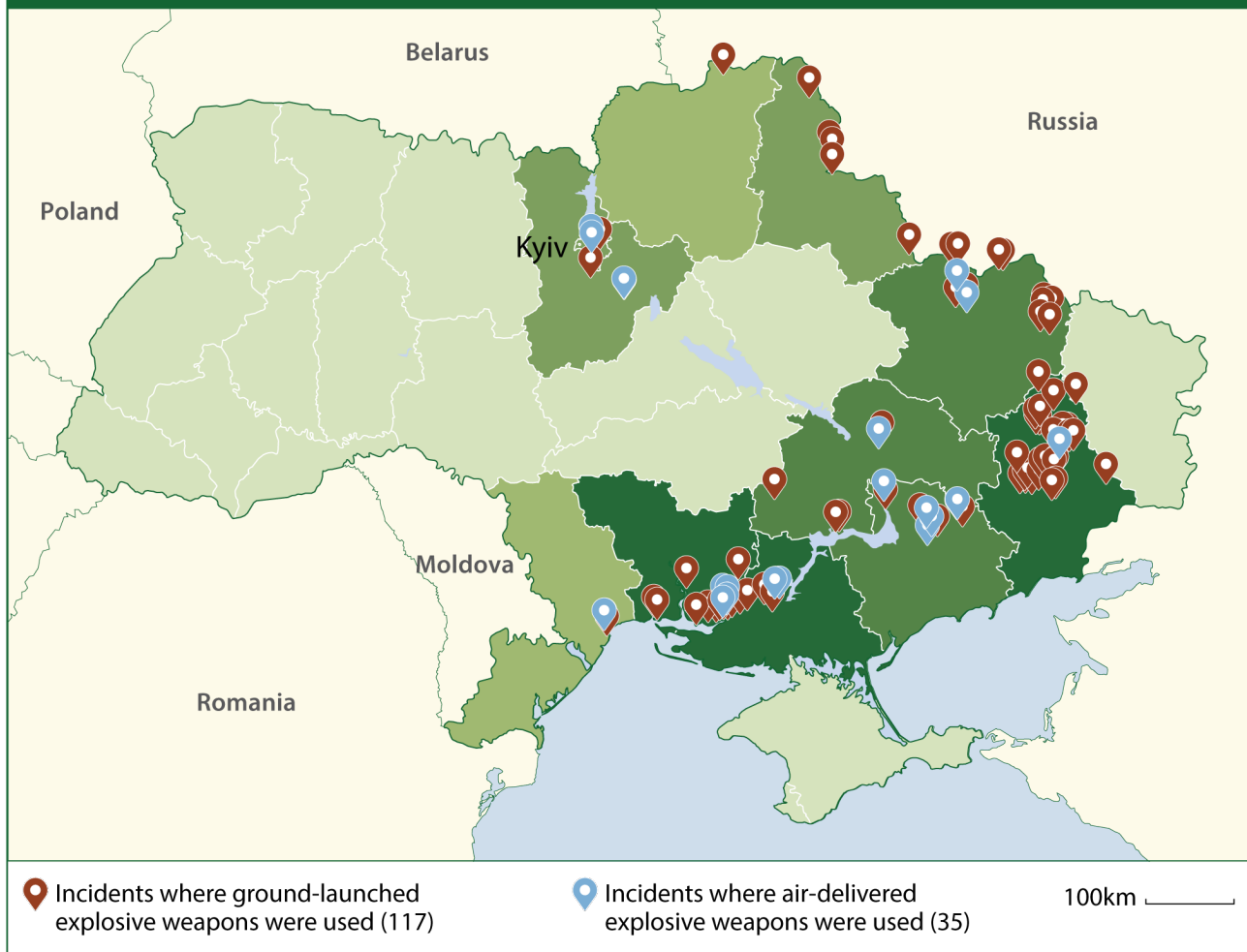




Explosive weapons use

Explosive weapons use impacted health care at least 253 times in 2023. Health workers were killed and injured and hospitals damaged. Most involved artillery and mortar shelling, missiles, mines, and rockets.² Russian forces used drones armed with explosives in 17 incidents, compared to two in 2022, and attacks were recorded in Khersonska, Kyivska, Odeska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts, a change from the more limited focus of drones affecting health care reported from only Mykolaivka and Zhytomyrska oblasts in 2022. While the company that had manufactured these drones was not recorded in most incidents, on at least one occasion an Iranian-made Shahed-136 drone damaged Kherson Regional Psychiatric Care Institution and injured a doctor as he tried to evacuate the patients from the facility to a bomb shelter.³ Eight incidents recorded Russian aircraft-delivered explosives impacting health care. Most reports documented damage to health facilities, with two female doctors killed by a Russian-made Kh-22 “Storm” missile in Dnipropetrovsk.⁴ The UK Ministry of Defence has criticized this long-range anti-ship missile as being inaccurate.

Reported incidents where Russian forces used explosive weapons impacting health care in Ukraine, 2023





In Bakhmut raion (district), Donetsk oblast, Russian forces used cluster munitions in an attack on a cultural center that had been turned into humanitarian facility where aid and health care were provided, leaving the facility inoperable.⁵ When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, they often have wide-area effects and cause death and destruction beyond the intended target, resulting in reverberating adverse effects on the health sector.

Health facilities damaged and destroyed

Hospitals, including maternity and children’s facilities, pharmacies, and warehouses, were damaged or destroyed on 192 separate occasions in 2023. Most involved explosive weapons used by Russian forces. The exceptions were three incidents where Russian forces fired shots inside a hospital and damaged another, and unidentified attackers fired shots inside a clinic, damaging it.⁶ Cases were spread over 13 oblasts, with most taking place in Donetsk and Khersonska. Often civilians were killed or injured, and civilian infrastructure was damaged, including Kherson Regional Children’s Hospital, which was damaged when Russian forces attacked Kherson city 36 times with artillery, rockets, mortars, tanks, and drones.⁷



ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE IN UKRAINE

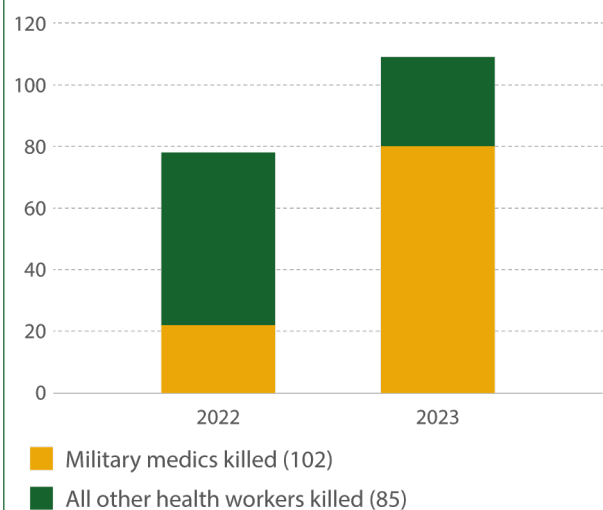
This [interactive map](#) documents attacks on health care in Ukraine since the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. It is available in English and Ukrainian, and allows viewers to explore where incidents took place and what happened, including, in some cases, via photos. This SHCC factsheet reflects data for 2023 current as of January 15, 2024, but the map and dataset are continuously updated. The map includes events where preventive measures were taken to protect staff and programs and summary that are not counted as “incidents” in this factsheet.

Health workers killed and injured

At least 109 health workers were killed in 101 incidents in 2023, compared to 78 killed in 62 incidents in 2022. Eighty were military medics, with nearly two-thirds killed on the front lines in Donetsk and Zaporizka oblasts. In contrast, 22 military medics were killed in 2022, with nearly half of these deaths documented in Donetsk oblast. Twenty-nine health workers, including ambulance drivers, doctors, nurses, paramedics, and volunteer health workers, were killed while working inside hospitals, and in one case in their home, or in double-tap attacks while providing medical care to civilians injured in previous Russian attacks. In total, 71 health workers were reported to have been injured in 43 incidents in 2023, compared to 60 reported injured in 38 incidents in 2022. Two-fifths were injured in Beryslav and Kherson raions in Khersonska oblast.

Reported health worker killings in Ukraine, 2022-2023

Military medics killed while providing care to wounded soldiers on the front lines quadrupled from 22 to 80 between 2022 and 2023.





Health facilities repurposed for military use

Fully functioning health facilities were repurposed as military bases or for other non-medical purposes by Russian forces on 36 occasions in 2023, compared to 51 such incidents in 2022. Incidents increased between February and April 2023 and were recorded in four oblasts and Crimea, with most taking place in Luhanska and Zaporizka oblasts. In 22 incidents, Russian forces reportedly forcibly evicted patients and staff from hospitals and used them for the exclusive use of wounded soldiers. In nine cases Russian forces reportedly launched attacks on Ukrainian forces from health facilities. Often during these incidents vital medical supplies and equipment were removed or seized and sometimes taken to hospitals in Russian-occupied areas.



UKRAINE'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM UNDER RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

This case study reveals lesser-known aspects of Russia's destruction and weaponization of Ukraine's health care system, specifically that Russian armed forces have limited and conditioned civilians' access to health care in temporarily occupied territories. "Our research sheds new light on the grim realities that patients and providers alike are forced to endure in order to access and provide basic health services," said Christina Wille, the director of Insecurity Insight.

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

Health care provision continued to be seriously undermined in 2023, especially in territory under Russian occupation and areas in eastern Ukraine close to front line fighting. For example, among health facilities accessible for data collection in Donetska oblast between November 2022 and May 2023, a third were reported to be non-functional and another third were only partially functioning due to insecurity and damage. This compounded obstacles to accessing health care that already existed in the Russian-occupied territory of Autonomous Crimea as early as 2014, when civilians who did not take up Russian citizenship were barred from receiving medical treatment and obtaining medication. More recently, this has also been the case in the newly occupied territories, where access to health care has become conditioned on a forced change of nationality. A Russian administrator in a town in occupied Khersonska stated in December 2023 that medicines "purchased from the budget of the Russian Federation" would "not be distributed to Ukrainian citizens."

Access to health care in the newly occupied territories has become conditioned on a forced change of nationality.

Many Russian doctors have been deployed to Russian-occupied areas to work alongside and replace Ukrainian doctors, exacerbating the psychological trauma of Ukrainian health workers and undermining the functioning of the health care system due to differences in practices in the two health systems. One Ukrainian health worker commented that Russian doctors "did not understand what electronic databases



were, what confidentiality meant, that not everyone should see the data. They did not communicate with our staff. Our staff were used only as servants.”

Across non-occupied parts of Ukraine, the vast majority of health facilities remained functional in 2023. The resilience of the country’s health system can partially be attributed to its relatively high baseline quality prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion and the rapid repair of many damaged health facilities. Nonetheless, some patients still faced obstacles to accessing treatment.

Economic barriers were the main impediment to receiving treatment in areas outside of Russian-occupied areas. Medication prices continued to rise in 2023, while state budget cuts reduced the Ukrainian Ministry of Health’s capacity to purchase medicines. Many Ukrainians had already experienced income losses since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion. The cost was the primary barrier cited by one in ten people who reported being unable to access health care in the previous three months, according to a survey of people in front line areas in Ukraine conducted in September 2023. An insufficient health workforce and the “unavailability of necessary services” were also cited.

Specialized health diagnostic services, including for cancer and associated treatments, continued to be disrupted across Ukraine in 2023, primarily due to the lack of the required medical equipment and personnel. As conditions go undiagnosed and untreated, this is likely to produce long-term negative consequences for Ukrainians.

Substantial investment is required to restore and improve the quality of health care in Ukraine. As of September 1, 2023, damage to health facilities since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion was estimated to have cost the health system USD 2.9 billion.

-
- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 37101; 38820; 40254; 40838; 40969; 44479.
 - 2 In 26 incidents the type of explosives used was not recorded.
 - 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 42919.
 - 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 36644.
 - 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 39952.
 - 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 36957; 37104; 42642.
 - 7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 UKR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 36750.

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

Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition
615 N. Wolfe Street, E7143, Baltimore, MD 21205
SHCC administrator, safeguardinghcc@gmail.com