FIRST YEAR OF THE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE:
HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Civilian Casualties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Impacts on Migration and Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Impacts on Women, Children and Gender and Sexual Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Impacts on the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Impacts on Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Humanitarian Aid Efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PSR’s Prescription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Russian war in Ukraine, which began when Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has had catastrophic consequences on civilians in Ukraine, as well as those who fled or were forcibly displaced. Many of these consequences will have lasting impacts for Ukrainians, and the country as a whole as the war wages on.

In the beginning, we watched millions of Ukrainians and other people living in Ukraine flee the violence initiated by Russian forces. We witnessed miles-long lines of people trying to cross over into neighboring countries. We watched Black and African refugees facing discrimination, refusal to cross borders, and even detained by EU border authorities while political pundits and officials spouted thinly-veiled racist sentiments about how this war was different from the countless wars elsewhere being waged against Black and Brown people.

Since then, reports of civilian harm and violence have trickled in as the war intensifies and drags on. This PSR report is intended to spotlight the wide array of violence, trauma, and death imposed on civilians since the Russian invasion.
Civilian Casualties

From February 24, 2022 to February 12, 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has recorded 18,955 civilian casualties in Ukraine.

7,199 civilians killed as a result of the war (2,888 men, 1,941 women, 226 boys, 180 girls, and 32 children and 1,932 adults whose sex is not yet known).

11,756 injured (2,616 men, 1,856 women, 341 boys, and 253 girls, as well as 260 children and 6,430 adults whose sex is not yet known).

More than 50% of these casualties were within the Donbas, which consists of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights believes that the actual numbers are much higher.
Several reports from various human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have documented countless war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian forces against Ukrainian civilians. Ukrainian officials have received over 66,000 reports of war crimes from Ukrainians since Russia invaded, and the number is growing daily. This includes torture, summary executions, and forced disappearances. Detainees reported beatings, electric shocks, mock executions, and waterboarding as some examples of the torture they faced. This cruel treatment is extended to Ukrainian prisoners of war, who have been held in inhumane makeshift prisons in basements and pits, and experienced torture leading to death at the hands of Russian soldiers.

Since the beginning of the invasion, Russian forces have continuously and indiscriminately bombed and shelled civilian areas across Ukraine. These attacks destroyed or severely damaged homes, schools, healthcare institutions, and other critical infrastructure. These indiscriminate bombings and shellings have disrupted civilians’ access to electricity, heat, and water during the harsh winter. Those trying to flee the carnage are not safe either; Russian forces attacked civilians fleeing in vehicles without attempting to verify whether or not they were civilians. Thousands of those fleeing who weren't killed were forced to undergo intrusive “filtration,” where Russian officials collected vast amounts of sensitive personal information and biometric data.

Ukrainian forces are not innocent of putting civilians in harm's way during this war either, though not to the extent of Russian forces. An Amnesty International report found that Ukrainian forces’ war tactics like establishing bases and operating weapon systems in populated residential areas – including schools and hospitals – have impacted the safety of many Ukrainians. These tactics violate international humanitarian law, as they turn civilians and their communities into military targets for Russian attacks while also hindering civilians’ access to critical infrastructure in their areas. The UN has also reported Ukrainian forces mistreating Russian prisoners of war.
The forced migration and fleeing of Ukrainians and other people impacted by the war has created the largest European refugee crisis since World War II. To put this in perspective, Europe received around one million refugees during the 2015 migration wave from Southwest Asian and African countries, and up to four million refugees during the Yugoslav wars during the 1990s. According to U.S. officials, Russian forces have, so far, forcibly transferred up to 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees to Russia by September of 2022, with many coerced into renouncing their Ukrainian nationality. Russia is trying to write this off as “humanitarian evacuations,” but forced transfers are considered a war crime.

Since March of 2022, over six million refugees have returned to Ukraine, though migrant experts warn that planned Russian spring offensives could result in up to four million more refugees in 2023.

In an effort to assist the refugees, the European Union (EU) immediately implemented its Temporary Protection Directive, a law never used before that allows people fleeing Ukraine to live and work in EU states for up to three years without having to apply for asylum. European countries set up temporary housing, hospitals, and other facilities to provide services and resources to Ukrainian refugees. Some countries, like Ireland, have even waived all visa requirements for Ukrainian refugees. However, migrant experts worry about “refugee fatigue” over the course of this year as the war wages on and Europe contends with high energy prices, housing shortages, and a mounting economic crisis.
According to UNICEF, around 5.3 million children encounter barriers preventing their access to education as a result of the war, with 3.6 million children lacking access to education due to school closures.

Ukraine’s Ministry of Education reported that over 2,600 schools have been damaged and over 400 destroyed across the country as the war continues.

Women, children, and gender and sexual minorities have faced a variety of challenges and violence since the invasion. Several forms of gender-based violence (GBV) have been reported, and there is a notably higher risk for women and girls fleeing the war, attempting to cross through border checkpoints, visiting transit centers, and seeking refuge in bomb shelters. In a December 2022 report analyzing GBV from February 24 to October 21, 2022, the UN documented 86 cases of sexual violence, most of which were carried out by Russian forces. This included rape, gang rape, forced nudity and forced public stripping. Of those cases, women and girls were the majority of victims and survivors of this GBV. Ensuing hostilities, displacement, and destruction of medical services, compounded by the stigma of GBV and retaliation, have grossly hindered survivors’ ability to access the essential care they need.

The UN has warned that the impacts of this war on children will be felt for years, long after this war is over – whenever that will be. The destruction of schools and disruption in education access is hindering children’s ability to learn and their social development. If children cannot access the vital education and social interaction needed at pivotal stages of development, made worse by the stress and trauma of living through war, it will create ripple effects across Ukrainian society.
It is difficult to grasp the full impacts of the war on gender and sexual minorities in and fleeing Ukraine. People cannot share their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of being met with discrimination or violence. Transgender people whose identity doesn’t match their official identity documents experience harmful barriers when seeking safety or care. Many queer Ukrainians reported being denied crossing at official Ukrainian border crossings and even mistreatment by officials. What is clear, is that being a gender or sexual minority serves only to exacerbate the challenges and obstacles civilians face as they try to navigate this war.
Impacts on the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

UN and human rights organizations have noted that older people and people with disabilities have been and continue to be disproportionately impacted by the war. Many elderly homes and homes for those with disabilities managed to evacuate their residents to Dnipro, but some have been trapped in residential institutions without access to key services, impacting their safety and health. Older people and people with disabilities experience more challenges in accessing humanitarian services and struggle with the forced separation and isolation that accompany war. The disruption to electricity and power during the harsh winter has exacerbated these challenges for older people especially, due to existing health issues, limited mobility, and lack of income.
Impacts on Health

The World Health Organization reported that between February 24, 2022 and February 16, 2023, there were 780 verified attacks on health care infrastructure that resulted in 101 deaths and 131 injuries.

As of February 16, 2023, more than 5.38 million cases of COVID-19 and 111,175 deaths were reported in Ukraine.

Only 38% of Ukrainians are vaccinated against COVID-19.

The war has had significant impacts on civilian health in Ukraine. Russian targeting of health care infrastructure has significantly reduced Ukraine’s capacity to provide health care and medical services. These attacks have been indiscriminate, with at least one children’s hospital, a maternity hospital, and a maternity ward destroyed by Russian forces.

Health officials are also concerned about the potential spread of infectious diseases as a direct result of Russia destroying Ukraine’s public health infrastructure. In the Russian-occupied city of Mariupol, authorities had to implement quarantine measures due to fears of a cholera and dysentery outbreak. Meanwhile, the UN human rights mission in Ukraine has also vocalized concerns about reports that Ukrainian prisoners of war contracted diseases like Hepatitis A and Tuberculosis.

The violence of the ensuing war, in conjunction with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, has severely exacerbated the chronic mental health crisis in Ukraine.
Approximately 40% of Ukraine’s population is now in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

As of December 31, 2022, the UN and humanitarian partners have been able to supply 15.8 million people with humanitarian assistance since the start of the war. However, officials have noted that there are several areas within Ukraine that they are unable to access to provide humanitarian aid.

According to the UNOCHA, as of February 5, 2023, more than a quarter of the 19 million people in need of humanitarian aid live in areas where access to that aid is highly restricted.
PSR firmly supports the NGOs calling for unhindered access for humanitarian staff and assistance to civilians across the country that is still being denied in areas controlled by Russian forces.

To minimize additional humanitarian harm, the warring parties must negotiate an end to hostilities as soon as possible. Along with International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, PSR urges Russia, the U.S., and NATO to keep nuclear weapons out of this war. The civilian harm in the first year of this war is completely unacceptable and could increase to levels beyond our human comprehension if the current conflict escalates to a nuclear war.

**Nuclear weapons do not keep anyone “safe;” nor are they politically viable to win this, or any, war.**
We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to advocate for a nuclear weapons-free world and an end to the Russian war in Ukraine.

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