

Ukraine: protection of civilians in armed conflict

February 2024 update



HRMMU visits the scene of an incident in Kharkiv, where loitering munitions struck a fuel station on 9 February, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to houses

Date: 7 March 2024

Summary

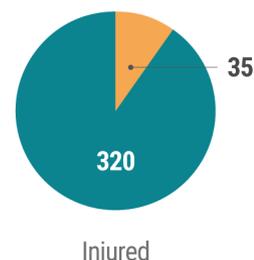
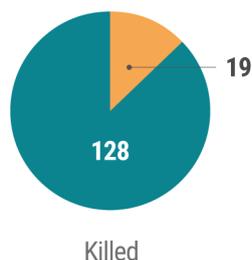
- The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) verified that at least **502 civilians were killed or injured** in Ukraine in February 2024. This number constitutes a **24 per cent decrease in comparison with January 2024**, after a spike in civilian casualties documented in December 2023 and January 2024, primarily from intensified attacks by Russian armed forces with missile and loitering munitions operational at long ranges.
- Most casualties in February 2024 continued to be caused by explosive weapons with wide area effects, with 73 per cent from the use of **artillery, MLRS and, increasingly, aerial bombardment**, in communities near the frontline, mainly in **Kharkiv, Kherson and Donetsk regions**.
- Most civilian casualties (**89 per cent**) and damage to educational and health facilities (**64 per cent**) continued to occur in Government-controlled territory.

Civilian casualties February 2024¹

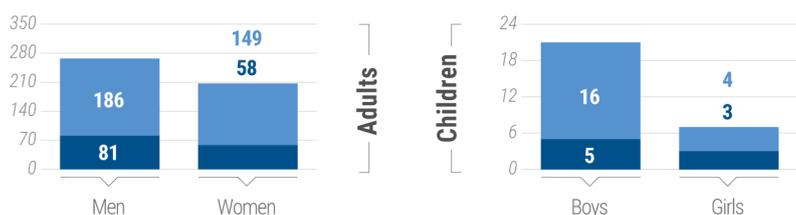
Total civilian casualties **502** { **147** Killed **355** Injured

1. By territory where casualties occurred

█ controlled by the Government
█ occupied by the Russian Federation



2. By age and sex



3. By type of weapon/incident



Damage to educational and medical facilities February 2024

█ Medical facilities
█ Educational facilities

Destroyed: **0** Medical, **6** Educational
 Damaged: **5** Medical, **26** Educational



HRMMU staff visits site that was attack in Kharkiv on 7 February

Significant incidents

- On 3 February, an attack struck a bakery and a café in the occupied Lysychansk, Luhansk region, which reportedly resulted in 29 people killed and 9 injured. At least 13 individuals among those killed and injured were civilian (8 women and 5 men).⁴
- On 9 February, seven civilians were killed, including two men, two women and three young boys, when loitering munitions struck a fuel station in a residential area of Kharkiv, starting a fire that burned at least 15 residential homes to the ground.
- On 14 February, a central hospital in government-controlled Selydove, Donetsk region, was struck, resulting in two woman and a 9-year-old boy killed and at least two women, one man and one boy injured.
- On 20 February, a UAV attack killed an entire family (3 women and 2 men) in their home in Nova Sloboda, Sumy region.

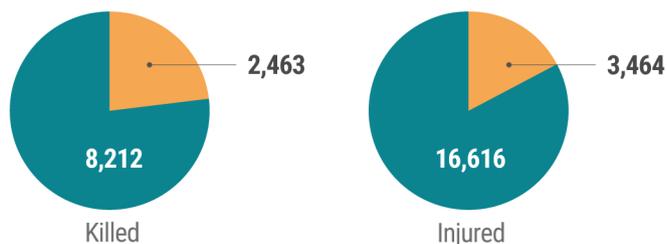
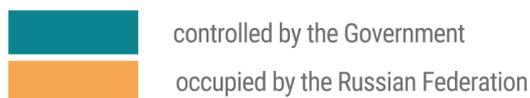
"Avdiivka? There is no more Avdiivka. It's gone. It was levelled down [by shelling and bombings]. There are no more homes there. There is nothing."

IDP pensioner from Avdiivka displaced in Dnipropetrovsk region, about the level of destruction of her hometown, recently occupied by the Russian Federation

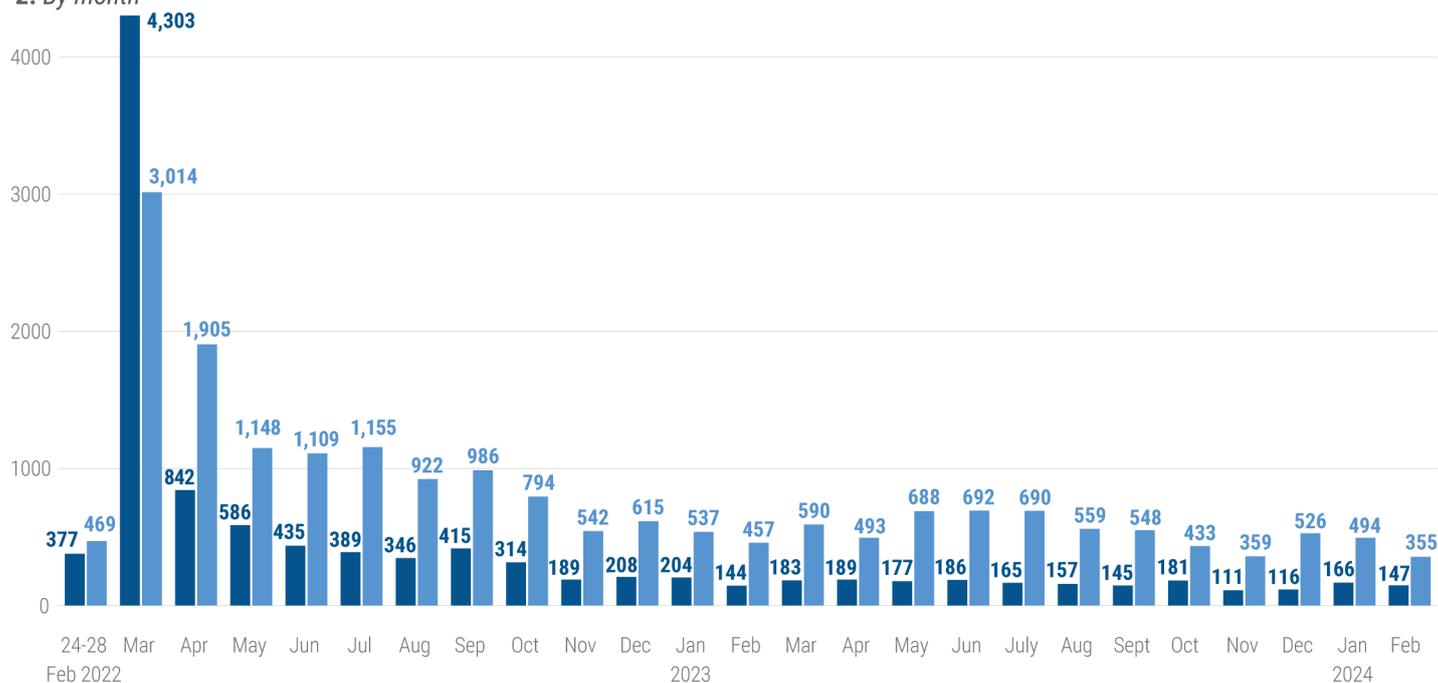
Civilian casualties since 24 February 2022⁵

Total civilian casualties **30,755** [**10,675** Killed **20,080** Injured]

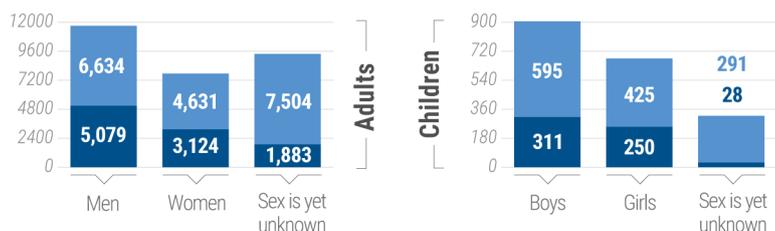
1. By territory where casualties occurred



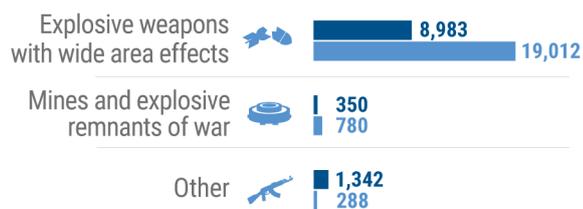
2. By month



3. By age and sex



4. By type of weapon/incident



Damage to educational and medical facilities since 24 February 2022



Civilian casualties (killed) since 2014





The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine

HRMMU collects information about civilian harm from conflict-related violence from a wide range of sources, including through interviews with victims, their relatives, and witnesses; open-source information, including photo and video material; forensic records and reports; criminal investigation materials; court documents; reports by international and national non-governmental organisations; public reports by law enforcement and military actors; data from medical facilities and local authorities.

All sources and information are assessed for their relevance and credibility and cross-checked against other information. In some instances, corroboration takes time. This means that conclusions on civilian casualties may be revised as more information becomes available and numbers may change as new information emerges over time.

Statistics presented in the current update are based on individual

records of civilian harm where the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard of proof was met, namely where, based on a body of verified information, an ordinarily prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that the harm took place as described. HRMMU refers to information that meets this criteria as “verified.”

The actual extent of civilian harm – both casualties and infrastructure damage – is likely considerably higher as many reports of civilian harm, particularly from the period immediately after the full-scale armed attack, have not been possible to verify due to the large number of reports and the lack of access to relevant areas. The number of civilian casualties is likely particularly undercounted in cities where there was protracted intensive fighting at the start of the armed attack in 2022 – such as Mariupol (Donetsk region), Lysychansk, Popasna, and Sievierodonetsk (Luhansk region).

¹ The actual number might be higher as some reports are still pending confirmation.

² Incidents in which civilians were killed or injured by shelling from artillery, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), by cruise and ballistic missiles (air, sea and land-based), and by air strikes, including loitering munitions and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

³ Incidents in which civilians were killed or injured by fire from small arms and light weapons, including as a result of crossfire, sniper fire, escalation of force incidents (cases in which military opened fire on civilians whom they perceived as a threat), and wilful killings, as well as road accidents involving either military vehicles or civilian vehicles driven by military in the area of hostilities.

⁴ When HRMMU has not designated a casualty as a civilian, it does not necessarily mean that HRMMU has established that the individual was an active member of an armed group or otherwise directly participated in hostilities. In many cases, the non-designation of an individual as a civilian reflects a lack of information, rather than information that the individual was not a civilian. In the 3 February attack on Lysychansk, HRMMU has established that several of those killed occupied official positions in the civilian administration in occupied territory, including in the police, the prosecutor’s office, and emergency services. Occupying such civilian positions does not alone render an individual a legitimate target under international humanitarian law.

⁵ HRMMU believes that the actual figures are considerably higher, as many reports, particularly from certain locations and from the immediate period after 24 February 2022, are still pending corroboration. This concerns, for example, Mariupol (Donetsk region), Lysychansk, Popasna, and Sievierodonetsk (Luhansk region), where there were allegations of high civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. An increase in total figures in this update compared with the previous update is not only due to casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure that occurred in the reporting period as HRMMU also continues to corroborate cases that occurred before the reporting period.