

# Impact on healthcare from bombing and shelling in Ukraine



31 March 2022

PAX has been monitoring the impact on civilians and their environment from the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We monitor media and social media reports through Telegram, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, use and contribute to monitoring efforts by other collectives such as Bellingcat, and geolocate for verification. In this publication we highlight one aspect of civilian harm from the bombing and shelling of Ukrainian towns, which is the impact on healthcare. This publication only lists a limited number of locations. Undoubtedly more information will surface that will add to this non-exhaustive list. We welcome any input, feedback and collaboration on this topic.

## Introduction

In 2017 PAX and Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic co-published a study on the impact from explosive weapon use on healthcare in government-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine. We visited hospitals, clinics, ambulance stations and other medical posts, and interviewed 55 people, including local residents, health care workers, UN representatives and local NGO staff. We documented the devastating impact, both direct as indirect, on healthcare from the use of explosive weapons in towns and cities. The health care system in eastern Ukraine, which already fell below the standards of other parts of Europe, has suffered as a result of the conflict already since 2014. Damage to hospital buildings and equipment, personnel fleeing or unable to visit their patients because of the violence, but also damage to infrastructure like water facilities, electricity and communication networks all had a deep impact on the healthcare system and the conditions under which medical personnel had to operate.

The current widespread damage to healthcare throughout Ukraine is deeply worrying and should inform both political action and humanitarian responses. PAX firmly condemns the invasion and calls for an immediate return of all Russian troops to outside Ukraine's sovereign territory.

## A pattern of harm

Both the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) **attribute** most of the civilian harm caused during the Russian invasion of explosive weapons with wide area effects. These weapons are generally considered to include weapons that are inaccurate (such as unguided artillery), weapons that launch multiple munitions (such as multi-barrel rocket launchers, also referred to as multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS)) or weapons that have a big blast and fragmentation radius (such as heavy aircraft bombs). We see all of these explosive weapons being used now in towns and cities in Ukraine, and the harm it causes is devastating.

Research indicates that worldwide **9 out of 10 casualties** from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians. **The ICRC warns** that the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas should be avoided, because of the high likelihood of indiscriminate effects. Internationally states are **working towards a political declaration** to prevent further civilian harm from the use of these weapons in populated areas.

As of 24 March, one month after the start of the invasion, the World Health Organization (WHO) had **verified 64 attacks** on health care. The WHO notes that this is more than 2-3 attacks per day, stressing that “Attacks on health care are a violation of international humanitarian law, but a disturbingly common tactic of war – they destroy critical infrastructure, but worse, they destroy hope,” according to Dr Jarno Habicht, WHO representative in Ukraine. On 26 March, in an interview with the **BBC**, Habicht expressed concerns that the number of attacks on healthcare is increasing daily”.

**OCHA** has reported many civilians to be left without access to water and electricity because of damage to water and electricity facilities. This also has a profound impact on the provision of healthcare: medical equipment needs electricity, medicines may need to be kept in a fridge, patients can not be washed, medical instruments can not be sanitized, light that is needed in operating rooms doesn't work, and so on. It also impacts heating systems, leaving patients in the cold.

One month after the invasion, the WHO **reports** that close to 7 million people are internally displaced, and the number of people that have fled to neighboring countries is fast approaching 4 million. This brings the total of displaced to 11 million – nearly a quarter of the population of Ukraine. Among these people, there will undoubtedly also be medical personnel that have been forced to flee.

Parties to conflict have an obligation to uphold international law and to protect the civilian population, including from harm caused by damage to and destruction of vital civilian infrastructure and services. PAX therefore **calls on all parties to the conflict** to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and protect civilians.

## International Humanitarian Law and damage to healthcare facilities

Within international humanitarian law (IHL) it is unlawful to target civilians or civilian objects. Hospitals are a civilian object, unless they are being used for military purposes. When they are, they lose their special protection under IHL, and become lawful targets. When in doubt, one should presume it is civilian and therefore should not target it. Another rule is that parties to conflict cannot use means and methods of war that make no distinction between civilian and military targets, such as cluster munitions, which are banned by a majority of states (though not Russia, nor Ukraine) for their inherently indiscriminate effects in the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

In Ukraine we see widespread reports of damage to medical facilities, but also to civilian infrastructure such as water and electricity networks. Whether these civilian objects are intentionally targeted or part of collateral damage, the impact on healthcare has deep and long-term consequences for civilians through the impact on accessibility, quality and availability of healthcare services.

In this publication we highlight one aspect of civilian harm from the bombing and shelling of Ukrainian towns, which is the impact on healthcare. It only lists a limited number of locations, and should be seen as a snapshot of the dire and quickly evolving situation on the ground. More attacks on healthcare are reported by the WHO, and undoubtedly more information will surface that will add to this non-exhaustive list and description of the attacks. We welcome any input, feedback and collaboration.

Our study in 2017, as well as a [PAX study in eastern Ukraine in 2015](#), showed very clearly how the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has effects that go beyond the direct effects of the weapon. These indirect and reverberating effects have a wider impact and deprive citizens, in the case of medical facilities, of utilities essential to the provision of health care.



## Healthcare under attack

The below, non exhaustive list of incidents highlight the tremendous impact on health care in Ukraine, and are based on public information, except for one attack on a pharmacy. We mainly looked at impact on medical facilities. It is important to acknowledge furthermore, that in order to establish the real impact on healthcare, a lack of medicine supplies, impact such as on water and electricity services, safety of medical personnel, damage to equipment and ambulances all have to be taken into account.

### Vuhledar, 24 February 2022

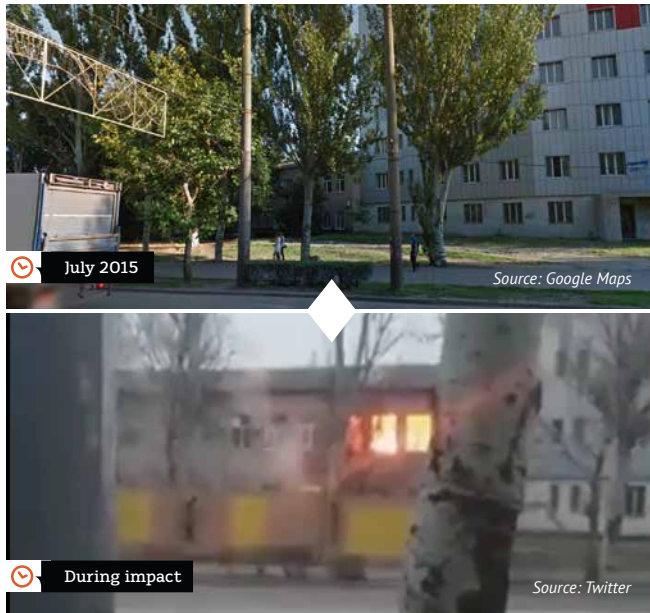
A Russian attack, confirmed by [Human Rights Watch](#) with cluster munitions struck just outside the Central City Hospital in Vuhledar on 24 February 2022. The attack killed four civilians and injured another ten, six of them healthcare workers, and damaged the hospital, an ambulance, and civilian vehicles.





## Melitopol, 24 February 2022

On 24 February, footage of an explosion in the oncology hospital, reportedly from Russian shelling, damaging one operating room, appeared. Ukraine's minister of health care, Viktor Liashko, said an operating room was damaged, but no patients were hurt in the attack.



## Bucha, 27 February 2022

On 27 February a pharmacy in the center of Bucha was targeted by Russian troops. It was severely damaged as can be seen on a photo taken on 27 February and shared with PAX. One month into the war, the WHO estimates that half of all pharmacies in Ukraine have been closed.

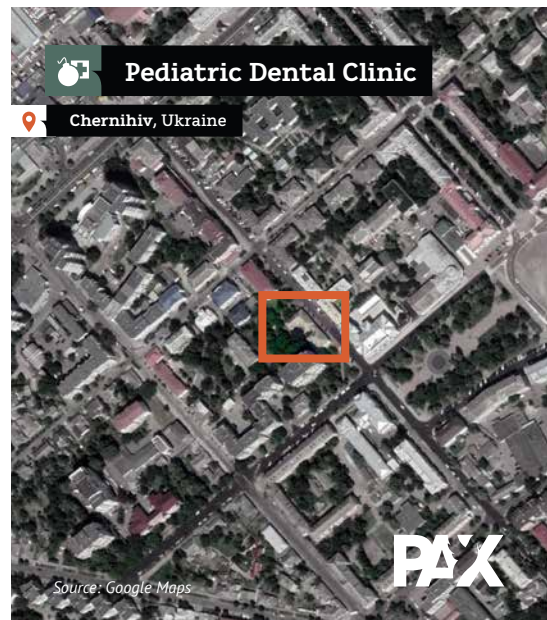


## Kherson, 26 February 2022

On 26 February Kyiv Independent **reported** that Russian soldiers fired at an ambulance, killing two and injuring one person near Kherson. A driver and a patient were reported by Segodnya news site to be burned alive. The patient that was transported by the ambulance, reportedly was injured due to Russian shelling earlier that day. He and the driver died in the ambulance attack.

## Chernihiv, 27 February 2022

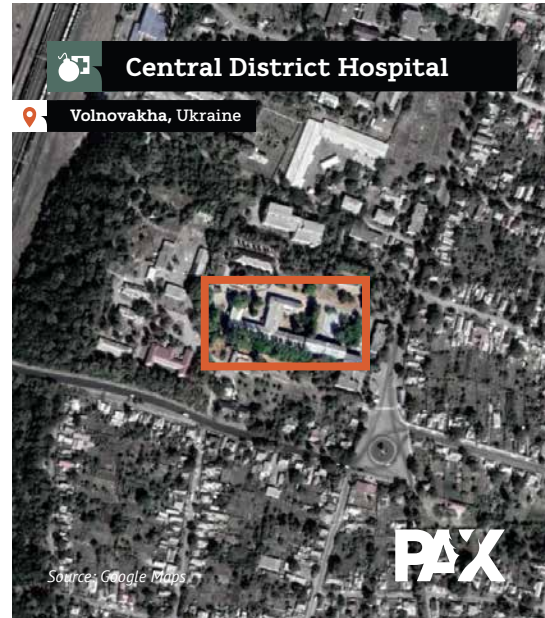
On 27 February, video images were shared on **Twitter** showing the destruction from a strike near the Pediatric Dental Clinic in Chernihiv. Research collective **Bellingcat** describes the attack to have involved “what is claimed may be a ballistic missile”. The Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine reported 16 injuries from shelling in the center of Chernihiv on that day.





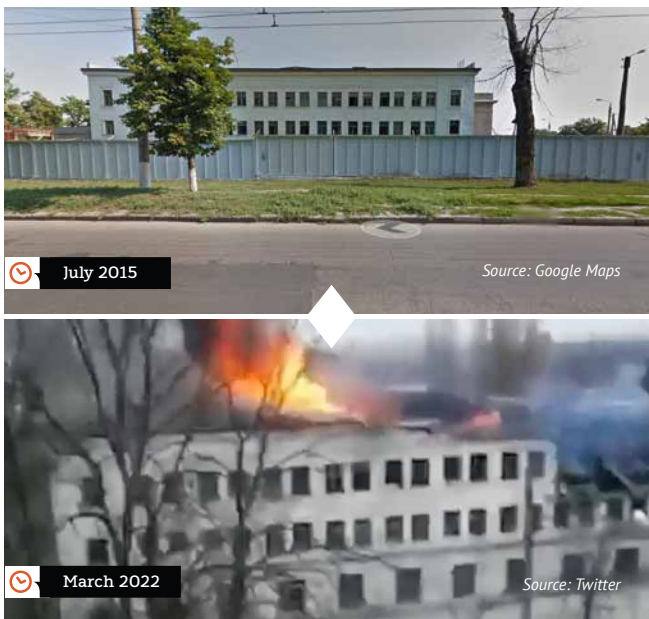
## Volnovakha, 27 February 2022

On 27 February a Telegram account of the Ukrainian parliament **reported** that the Ear, Nose and Throat department of the Volnovakha Central District Hospital was damaged by a Russian attack. The damage was confirmed by images on Google Maps, and reported by the **Washington Post**. We found no reports of civilian casualties in the attack.



## Kharkiv, 1 March 2022

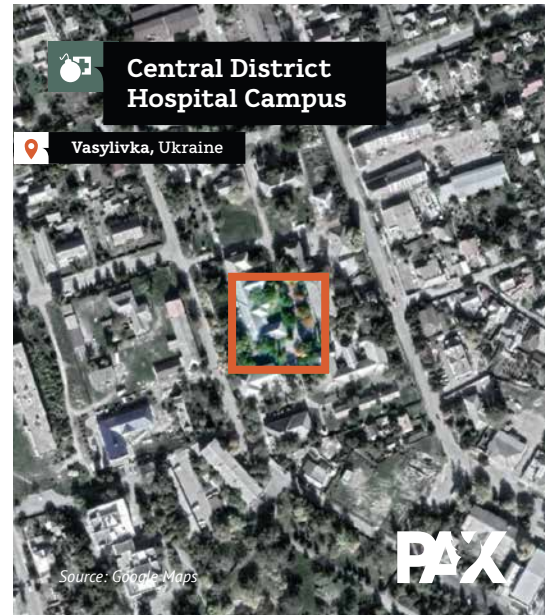
On March 1 damage from a Russian rocket attack was reported on a building in Kharkiv, which was reported on **Twitter** to be a hospital.





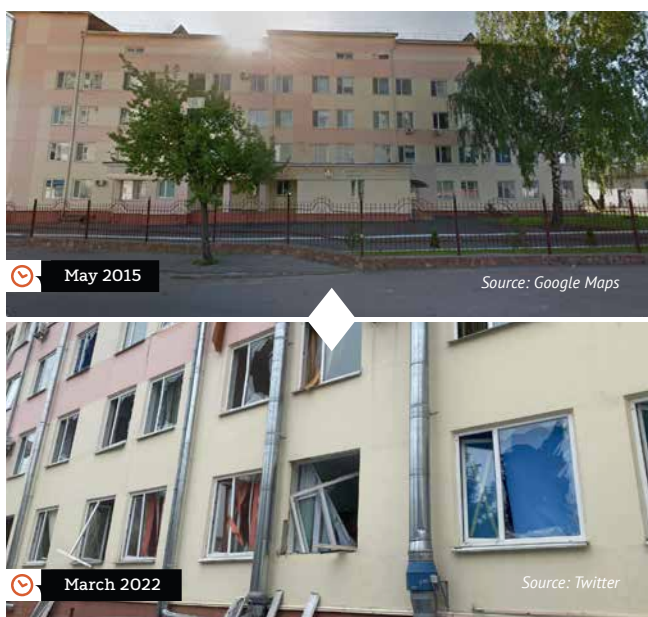
## Vasylivka, 1 & 2 March 2022

On 1 and 2 March, Zaporizhzhya Regional Military Administration **reported** Russian shelling of the surgical and sanitary departments of the Vasylivska Polyclinic's intensive care hospital. Video analysis of a video posted by **Washington Post** shows impact on the medical complex of the Central District Hospital. Four people were reportedly injured and three died from their injuries in the attack on the medical complex. The video also shows shattered windows in one of the pharmacies that is located on the complex.



## Zhytomyr, 2 March 2022

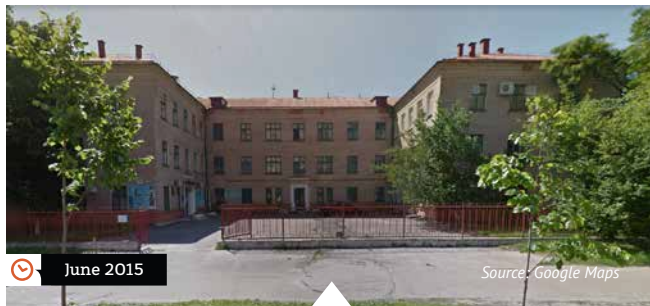
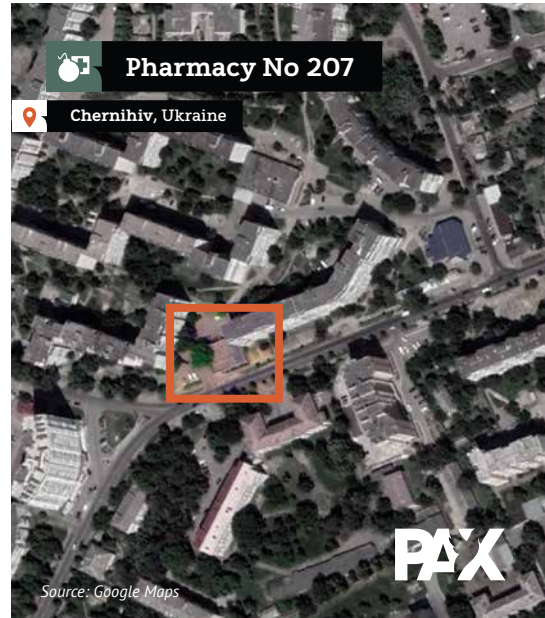
On 2 March Russian shelling in a residential area of Zhytomyr caused damage to the walls and windows of the second city hospital, **according** to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Zhytomyr Region. No casualties were reported in the hospital itself, but 3 people reportedly died and 17 people, including 7 children were injured during the attacks, according to the same source. Google Maps suggests that besides the hospital buildings, there also is a military base located in the vicinity of the impacted area.



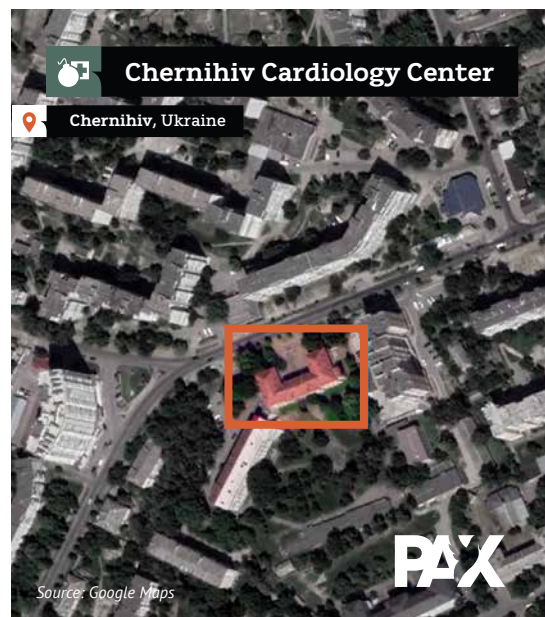


## Chernihiv, 3 March 2022

The Chernihiv Regional Administration reported that 47 people (38 men and nine women) were killed in a Russian airstrike on 3 March in Chernihiv. Research by [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) indicates that multiple unguided aerial bombs were dropped. At least one distinctive bomb crater, of a size consistent with surface impacted munitions of approximately 500 kg, was identified, according to Amnesty International. Footage available on [telegram](#) shows that the Chernihiv General Hospital as Amnesty calls it, or the Chernihiv Oncology Centre as it is called on Google Maps, was severely damaged in the attack.



Google Maps also indicates two pharmacies in the vicinity of the attack, one of which was also visibly damaged. Human Rights Watch [reports](#) that in the attacks also windows were blown out of the Children's Hospital, which is a couple of blocks away (and not shown in the map below).





## Izyum, 8 March 2022

On March 8 damage to the entrance of a hospital in Izyum was reported on [Twitter](#). Additional analysis suggests this to be the Central District Hospital. No casualties at the time of attack were reported. Reporting on March 26 by the [BBC](#) indicates that patients were present at the time of the Russian attack.



## Mariupol, 9 March 2022

On 9 March the Mariupol City Council [reported](#) that the Childrens Hospital was bombed by Russian troops. [CNN reports](#) that because of the large crater it is likely to have been an airdropped 500 kg High Explosive Bomb. 17 people were reported to be injured in the attack, and five have died since the attack.





## Mykolayiv, 11 & 21 March 2022

On March 11 The Mykolayiv regional governor reported on [telegram](#) that a Russian attack hit the hospital. The attack was also reported on by the [Washington Post](#). Bellingcat reports that the Mykolayiv Oncology Hospital was struck on March 11 by what appears to be [cluster munitions](#). While we were unable to identify the specific weapon used at this exact location, [HRW reports](#) that on 11 March cluster munitions were indeed used at multiple locations in Mykolayiv. No one was killed during the attack according to the governor. On 21 March, the Regional Psychiatric Hospital No 1 was reported to be hit by a missile in Mykolayiv furthermore.

## Mariupol, 14 March 2022

Maxar satellite image from 14 March posted by [CNN](#) shows a hole in the southern facade of Mariupol's Regional Intensive Care Hospital in the Zhovtnevyi neighborhood. On 15 March, Mariupol's Deputy Mayor reported to the [BBC](#) that about 400 people at the Regional Intensive Care Hospital, including patients and medical personnel were prevented by Russian forces to leave the hospital.



## Makariv, 22 March 2022

On March 22 images were shared on [Twitter](#) showing a building on fire in the aftermath of fighting in Makariv. The building contained a pharmacy which caught fire.

