

Humanitarian implications of the war in Ukrainian-controlled territory in Khersonska oblast

SUMMARY

Between December 2024 and February 2025, there was a significant increase in Russian artillery shelling in Khersonska oblast in territory under Government of Ukraine (GoU) control. Air attacks, especially drone attacks targeting civilians, also initially increased in the December–January period (a trend that had started in July 2024) before dipping in February 2025. The increase in the frequency and intensity of attacks and increased targeting of civilians have led to more deaths, injuries, and damage to civilian infrastructure, deteriorating already severe living conditions for civilians. Evacuation orders (mandatory for children under 18 and their caregivers) have been imposed in 50 towns and cities. Despite continued attacks across the whole of Kherson, the orders include only its Hidropark and Naftohavan districts located closest to the Dnipro River. Because of this, the 66,000 inhabitants of Kherson – currently the largest Ukrainian city under direct Russian shelling – remain at constant risk of shelling and air attacks as the city lacks sufficient air defence and bomb shelters to protect residents.

By January 2025, 141,000 people (99% of all residents of the Ukrainian-controlled territory of the oblast) were considered in need (OCHA 16/01/2025). Humanitarian needs are high, with 97% of surveyed families in Khersonska oblast (Ukrainian-controlled territory) expressing extreme need (REACH 23/12/2024). The most pressing needs relate to livelihood opportunities and housing, either the repair of damaged houses or provision of temporary alternatives for those unable to return to areas under constant shelling. With businesses closing or leaving Khersonska oblast, job opportunities are scarce, especially in smaller towns and villages. The war has also reduced income for some farmers, as constant shelling and land contamination by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) have reduced access to agricultural land (SI 06/08/2024).

About the report

Aim: the report aims to present the war-related developments and resulting humanitarian impacts in the Ukrainian-controlled territory of Khersonska oblast (namely Beryslavskyi raion and six hromadas of Khersonskyi raion: Bilozerska, Chornobaivska, Darivska, Khersonska, Muzykivska, and Stanislavska hromadas, located on the right bank of the Dnipro River) since July 2024.

Methodology: the report is based on a secondary data review of public information, complemented by eight key informant interviews held from January–February 2025 with representatives of Ukrainian NGOs, INGOs, and government institutions.

Limitations: this report does not provide a comprehensive analysis of all war-related developments in the areas of the oblast controlled by the GoU or their humanitarian impacts. A lack of publicly available evidence does not imply that other impacts have not occurred.

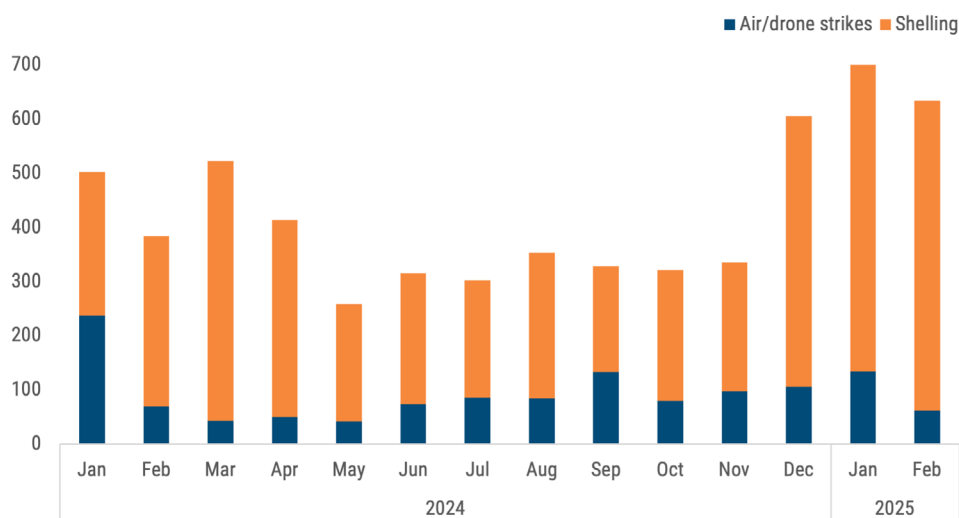
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Crisis overview	2
Humanitarian impact	5
Humanitarian access	7
Aggravating factors.....	8

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Although the presence of the Dnipro River prevents major shifts in territorial control in Khersonska oblast, air and shelling attacks by Russian forces on the oblast – especially Kherson – have become more frequent, while tactics have evolved to target civilians specifically. Air and drone attacks on areas of the oblast on the right bank of the river steadily increased from July–January – including a spike in September – before dipping in February, while incidents of artillery shelling in December 2024 were double that of November and were even higher in January and February 2025, as seen in Figure 1 (ACLED accessed 12/03/2025). In mid-March, Russian troops continued to attempt to seize a bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnipro River or one of its islands to make it easier to attack Ukrainian defence (TKI 24/12/2024; Wilson Center 07/01/2025).

Figure 1. Artillery and air attacks on Ukrainian-controlled territory of Khersonska oblast

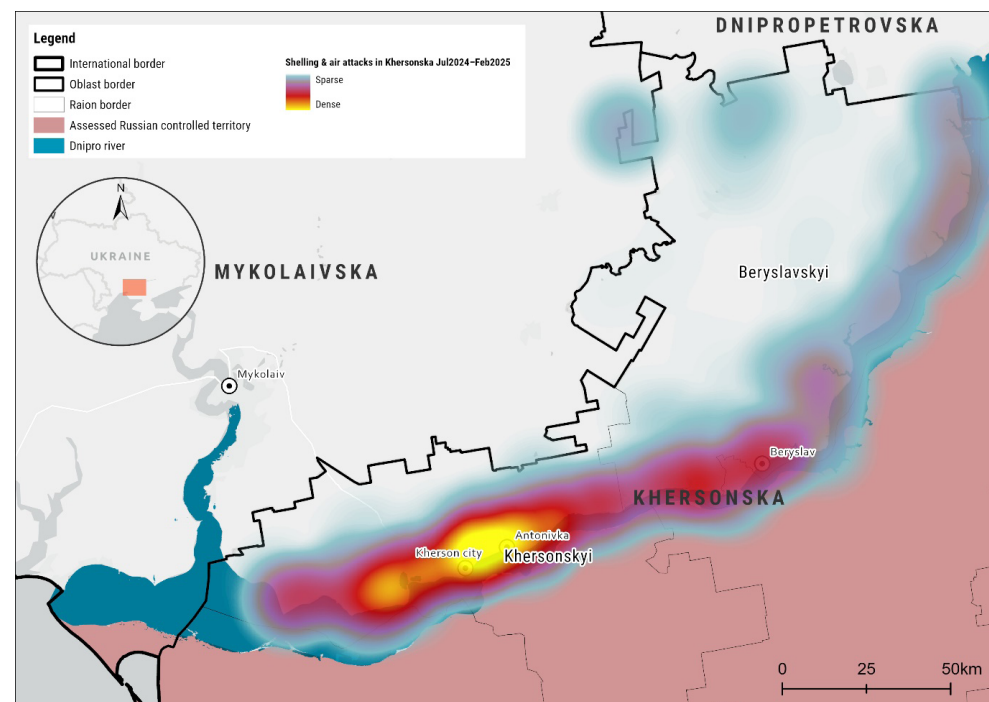


Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

This increase in air attacks and shelling in Khersonska oblast in the recent months is replicated along the front line, particularly in Donetsk oblast, and has been related to Russian forces' exploitation of Ukrainian defensive vulnerabilities, improved military tactics, and strategic targeting of key locations such as Toretsk and Pokrovsk in Donetsk oblast and Kupiansk in Kharkivska oblast (ISW 24/11/2024). Military analysts consider the capture of all of

Donetska, Khersonska, Luhanska, and Zaporizka oblasts, including the areas not occupied by Russia, to be Russia's strategic objective in Ukraine. Russia included the capture of these oblasts in its demands to Ukraine as a part of a ceasefire offer in June 2024 (ISW 17/02/2025; NYT 14/06/2024).

Map 1. Air attacks and shelling in Ukrainian-controlled territory of Khersonska oblast between July 2024 and February 2025

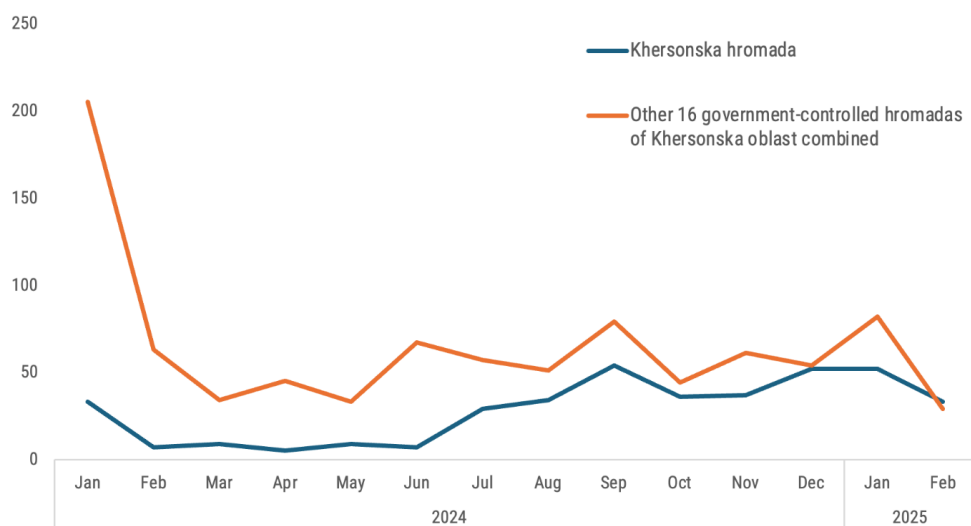


Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

The period from September 2024 to February 2025 saw a 56% increase in the average number of monthly air attacks (including drone attacks) compared to March–August 2024 (ACLED accessed 12/03/2025). According to the media, drone attacks were likely responsible for the biggest share of this increase (Ukrainska Pravda 03/01/2025; BBC 31/10/2024). Regional authorities reported over 12,000 drone attacks, which killed 64 people and injured more than 600 in territory under GoU control during the last five months of 2024 (UNITED24 04/02/2025). In particular, the Russian military has expanded the use of first-person-view (FPV) drones dropping munitions (such as bombs, grenades, and petal mines) in Kherson and adjacent

villages (Euromaidan Press 10/08/2024; CIR 03/12/2024). These drones, available on the commercial market and inexpensive to produce (at approximately USD 400), have been produced on a massive scale in Russia, and their use increased even more at the beginning of 2025 (Modern Diplomacy 14/12/2024; Espresso TV 17/02/2025). Russian forces have also used the drones to mine the region remotely with petal mines – lightweight plastic explosive mines that are launched into an area, settle on the ground, and explode upon pressure being applied on their surface, such as when stepped on. Unmanned aerial vehicles drop the mines on roads, pavements, and parks in towns along the Dnipro River. In 2024, landmines and ERW killed 13 civilians and injured 49 in the territory of Khersonska oblast under GoU control (Vgoru 02/01/2025).

Figure 2. Total number of air and drone strikes on Ukrainian-controlled territory in Khersonska oblast (excluding an area of Novokakhovska hromada, Kakhovskyi raion, located on the right bank of the Dnipro River) per month between January 2024 and February 2025

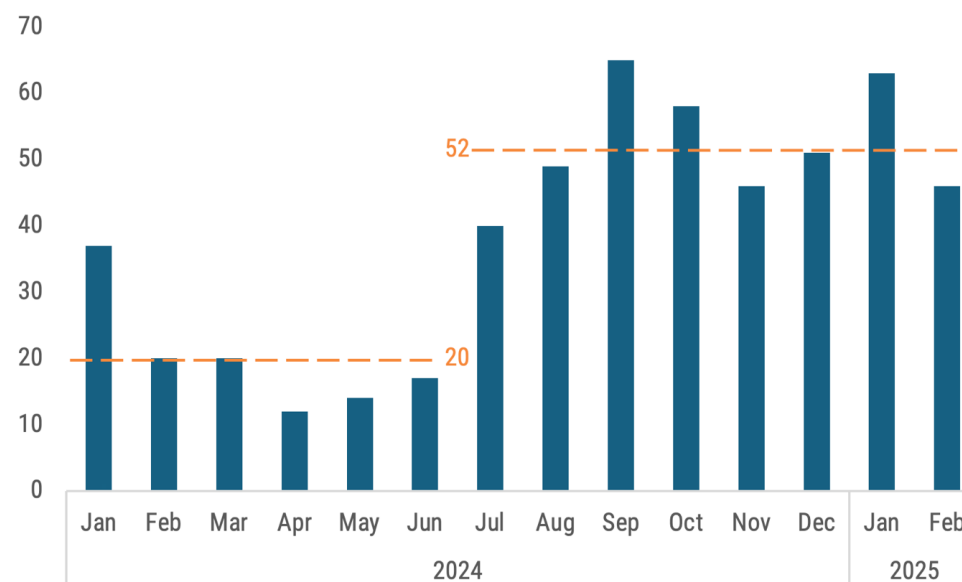


Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

As well as increasing drone use, it appears that Russian forces have changed tactics to deliberately target civilians, their vehicles, and civilian infrastructure (TKI 02/10/2024; CIR 03/12/2024). Reports indicate that Russian soldiers may be deliberately targeting civilians with FPV drones as a form of a live-fire training exercise (CIR 03/12/2024; The Economist 18/01/2025). The number of air attacks in which civilians were the main or only target increased by 50% during the second half of 2024 (as shown in Figure 4), with local sources claiming that nearly

130 drone attacks targeted civilians in Kherson alone, killing 70 people and injuring 700 between July 2024 and January 2025 (ACLED accessed 12/03/2025, CBC 30/01/2025). In January 2025 alone, drone attacks were responsible for 70% of all civilian casualties in the oblast (OHCHR 11/02/2025). The biggest number of air attacks (including by drones) has been in the most populated areas of Khersonska oblast, namely Kherson city and the adjacent Antonivka town, both located in Khersonska hromada (ACLED accessed 13/02/2025; TKI 02/10/2024).

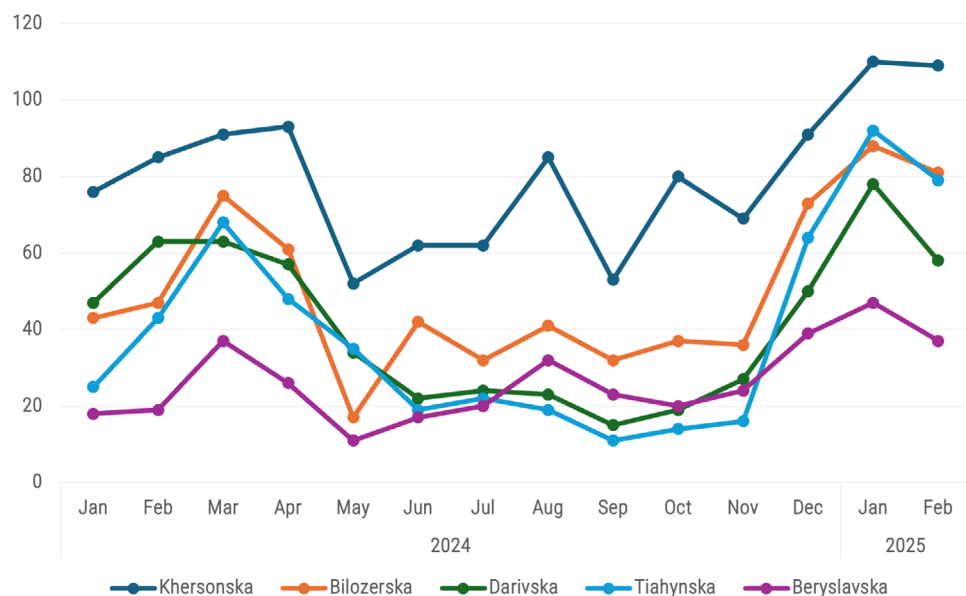
Figure 3. Air and drone attacks that hit civilian infrastructure in Ukrainian-controlled territory in Khersonska oblast between January 2024 and February 2025



Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

Artillery shelling and missile attacks in Khersonska oblast – on both military and civilian targets – more than doubled from December 2024 to February 2025 compared to the previous three months (1,741 attacks compared to 684 in the previous two months). The most affected hromadas have been Beryslavska, Bilozerska, Darivska, Khersonska (encompassing Kherson), and Tiahynska hromadas (ACLED accessed 12/03/2025).

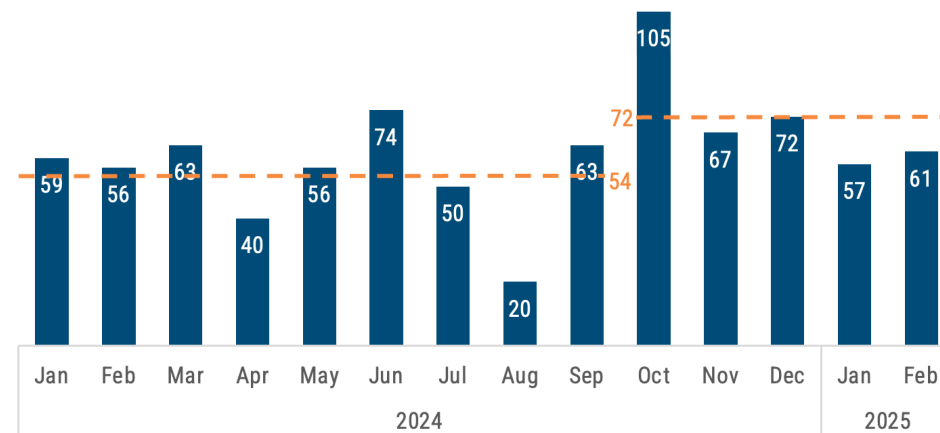
Figure 4. Artillery attacks on the five hromadas of Khersonska oblast most subject to shelling in January 2025



Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

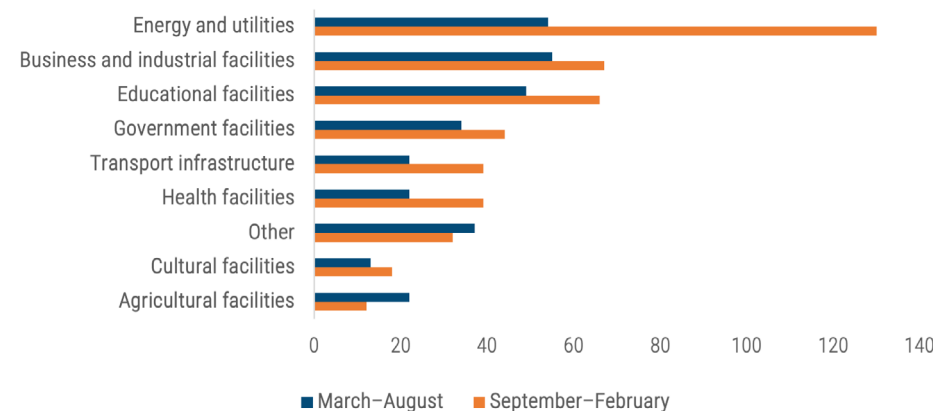
The intensification of shelling can be seen through the increase in damage to civilian infrastructure. In the December 2024 to February 2025 period, Khersonska oblast experienced the fourth-highest number of civilian infrastructure damage incidents of all the oblasts (191) after Dnipropetrovska, Donetsk, and Khersonska oblasts (ACAPS accessed 13/03/2025). Khersonskiyi raion experienced the most damage incidents (96), resulting in frequent blackouts in Kherson and neighbouring towns (ACLED accessed 13/02/2025; RBC-Ukraine 30/11/2024; Slovo i Dilo 28/11/2024; RBC-Ukraine 28/11/2024). Constant shelling and air attacks have slowed restoration efforts (Ukrainska Pravda 30/01/2025). Damage to power, energy, and gas infrastructure has increased by almost threefold between October 2024 and February 2025, compared to June–September 2024 (ACLED accessed 13/02/2025).

Figure 5. Recorded incidents of civilian infrastructure damage, excluding private houses in Khersonska oblast, between January 2024 and February 2025



Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

Figure 6. Comparison of the scale of infrastructure damage between the June–September 2024 period and the October 2024 to February 2025 period



Source: ACLED (accessed 12/03/2025)

Note: the ACAPS damage dataset does not include damage to private houses.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

Currently, approximately 145,000 people live in territory in Khersonska oblast under GoU control (30% of the population before the Russian full-scale invasion), including 66,000 in Kherson (25% of the population prior to February 2022), according to oblast authorities (Ukrinform 28/01/2025). Over 60,000 people (40% of the remaining oblast population) are over 60 years old – a far higher ratio than for the general population of Ukraine (approximately 25%) (Ukrinform 28/01/2025; HelpAge 24/02/2023). By January 2025, the number of people in need in Khersonska oblast was 141,000, of whom 14,000 were internally displaced (OCHA 16/01/2025).

In December 2024, a REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment found that 97% of surveyed families in Khersonska oblast (Ukrainian-controlled territory) expressed being in extreme need, which was the highest among all oblasts (REACH 24/12/2024).

Displacement

The increase in drone attacks and shelling has caused increased displacement. Between October 2024 and the middle of February 2025, at least 22,000 people left Bilozerska and Khersonska hromadas, which were the most affected by shelling in Khersonska oblast (Ukrainian government-controlled areas) (IOM, REACH Rapid Needs Assessment Kherson 10-11 February 2025). Most people have either stayed very close to their homes, the majority in adjacent hromadas, or gone to Mykolaivska or Odeska oblasts. In addition, pendular displacement has also been observed in recent months; many people who fled their settlements due to shelling or air attacks went back to their homes after several weeks when they perceived the situation as safer (KII 05/02/2025; KII 10/02/2025). IDPs in the most vulnerable conditions stay in collective sites. By January 2025, approximately 250 people resided in five active collective sites in Khersonska oblast, and over half of them were over 60 years of age (the largest number of older people in collective sites among all the oblasts), while over 80% were people with disabilities (CCCM Cluster 23/01/2025; KII 05/02/2025).

Protection

More than 120,000 people (83% of the population of the territory in Khersonska oblast under GoU control) live in hromadas within range of Russian artillery and officially considered 'red zones'¹ because of the consequent increased threat. By January 2025, the residents of red zones included 12,000 children, 62,000 older people, and 10,000 people with disabilities in the territory of Khersonska oblast under GoU control (Ukrainska Pravda 30/01/2025).

The increase in air attacks since July 2024 and shelling since December 2024 have led not only to deaths and injuries but also a deterioration of residents' sense of safety, with additional bomb shelters, protective gear, and drone sensors identified as priority needs (KII 03/02/2025; KII 04/05/2025; KII 05/02/2025; KII 11/02/2025).

Volunteers report an increase in requests for evacuation from people living in towns along the Dnipro River since September, which they attribute to the increased shelling (Suspilne 25/01/2025). By February 2025, mandatory evacuation applied to 50 towns and cities in Khersonska oblast located along the Dnipro River (Ukrainska Pravda 03/12/2024 and 10/08/2024). In 2024, approximately 6,200 people were evacuated from the right bank of the river in Khersonska oblast (Censor.NET 28/01/2025; Suspilne 25/01/2025). Shelling and drone attacks targeting civilian vehicles have made evacuations more complicated. Since December, several cars evacuating people from Antonivka have run into anti-personnel mines that Russian forces had remotely scattered on the roads (Intent 20/01/2025 and 30/12/2024; Ukrainska Pravda 30/01/2025).

The increased use of drones against civilians and the dropping of petal mines have severely affected public transport and people's mobility, hampering possibilities for evacuation. For example, the authorities have suspended public transport from Kherson city to Antonivka, Kindiyka, and Vostochny since 1 December and shortened the bus route between the village of Shyroka Balka of Stanislavska hromada and Mykolaiv city (Ukrainska Pravda 03/12/2024 and 30/01/2025). Trolleybus services have been temporarily stopped multiple times in Kherson in response to Russian shelling (Suspilne 15/10/2024). Drones have also been used in attacks against civilian cars, with several cases of deaths and injuries since October (Ukrainska Pravda 03/12/2024).

Constant shelling and attacks continue to hamper demining activities. Khersonska oblast is one of the most heavily mined oblasts in Ukraine. In 2024, landmines and ERW killed 13 civilians (including one child) and injured 49 (including two children) in the Ukrainian-controlled territory of Khersonska oblast (Vgoru 02/01/2025). Despite demining efforts, approximately 2,500km² remain contaminated with landmines and ERW (NikVesti 21/01/2025). The contaminated areas are mainly adjacent to the front lines, where demining activities are heavily constrained (Vgoru 02/01/2025; Ukrainska Pravda 03/12/2024; KSE 08/2023). The contamination mostly affects micro-agricultural producers' land, hindering agricultural activities and posing a life risk to farmers: from the beginning of the full-scale invasion until January 2025, at least 14 farmers have been killed (Ukrainska Pravda 30/01/2025).

In Khersonska oblast, health response services to gender-based violence are currently inadequate because of a lack of supplies and trained personnel, including supplies required for the clinical management of rape (CARE 12/02/2025). According to key informants, increased

¹ The red zones are Beryslavska, Bilozerska, Chornobayivska, Daryivska, Khersonska, Mylivska, Novooleksandrivska, Novoraiska, Novovorontsovka, Stanislavska, and Tyahynska hromadas.

attacks and shelling are also deteriorating communities' sense of safety, increasing stress levels and the risk of intimate partner violence. This, in turn, increases gender-based violence case management needs (KII 12/02/2025; KII 10/02/2025).

Shelter and NFIs

The air strikes and shelling have created significant shelter needs, particularly in areas within the red zone. By December 2024, there were approximately 30,000 damaged or destroyed houses in Khersonska oblast, including 1,300 apartment buildings and 28,700 private homes (Radio Svoboda 20/12/2024). In towns along the Dnipro River, key informants noted that there was no single house without any damage (KII 03/02/2025; KII 10/02/2025). In IOM's housing brief from July 2024, over half of the respondents from territory in Khersonska oblast under GoU control lived in a damaged house (IOM 15/07/2024). Considering the increase in shelling and drone attacks, this number has likely increased.

Key informants highlighted that despite the damage and destruction of houses, a lack of affordable housing opportunities may discourage people from evacuating from towns under shelling, particularly older people who rely on low pensions. This results in people living in damaged structures that do not provide adequate shelter, especially in the winter months (KII 03/02/2025; KII 10/02/2025). Housing restoration is one of the biggest needs for people in Khersonska oblast, but by July, approximately 50% of Transatlantic Dialogue Center survey respondents in Khersonska oblast had not had their houses restored. This ratio has likely increased since then. According to civil society representatives, even before the increased air attacks and shelling, reconstruction tended to be inefficient, as some authorities were slow to respond and struggled to address long-term challenges (TDC 02/07/2024). The current intensification of shelling since December has slowed down the reconstruction of houses further, as many contractors and humanitarian organisations have refrained from doing repairs because of unsafe working conditions coupled with a high probability of a house getting damaged again (KII 10/02/2025; KII 14/02/2025). Another problem is the lack of required documents confirming ownership of a property; this is a combined effect of property registers not being fully digitised in Ukraine – until 2023, only 40% of property ownership documents had been digitised – and the loss or nonexistence of paper property documents (Panfil et al. 28/06/2023). Without such documents, people whose houses are damaged or destroyed cannot apply for state reconstruction aid (eRecovery programme) (TDC 02/07/2024; DRC 20/08/2024).

In some frontline settlements there is a need for hygiene items (soaps, menstrual items and diapers) as the majority of the local population is unable to afford them (IOM, REACH Rapid Needs Assessment Kherson 10-11 February 2025).

At the end of December, intense Russian shelling prevented the restoration of electricity in towns along the Dnipro River. As a result, some villages and their remaining residents have been without electricity for more than a year, creating an even greater need for power banks and generators (Ukrainska Pravda 30/01/2025). Humanitarian responders have provided many generators, including solar ones (Intent 26/01/2025; Hope for Ukraine accessed 19/03/2025).

WASH

Shelling and air attacks affecting water supply systems have resulted in temporary outages, further complicating daily life for residents of multiple areas of Khersonska oblast. Attacks in late November disrupted the water supply for several days in Kherson (OCHA 17/12/2024). Flooding from the June 2023 Nova Kakhovka dam explosion has led to groundwater pollution with heavy metals in Beryslavska, Bilozerska, Muzykivska, Mylivska, and Stanislavska hromadas, rendering drinking water unsafe. This poses additional challenges for residents, as they need to rely on deliveries of free bottled water from government and humanitarian responders (TDC 02/07/2024; KII 31/01/2025).

Health

Access to medical services is critically limited in red zone hromadas of Khersonska oblast, especially in rural areas where there is a shortage of healthcare staff and equipment. Groups at heightened risk of reduced healthcare access include people with chronic illnesses and older people, who both need regular medical examinations, and people with disabilities, for whom travelling to distant healthcare facilities poses a challenge (CARE 12/02/2025). Frequent attacks on healthcare facilities have compounded these issues, making it difficult for residents to receive necessary medical care (TDC 02/07/2024). Khersonska oblast has the third-highest proportion of damage to health facilities among all oblasts in Ukraine (ACAPS accessed 13/03/2025). In an effort to protect patients from shelling and air attacks, the local government has established seven underground hospitals in the territory of Khersonska oblast under GoU control (Suspilne 07/02/2025).

The prolonged and recently increased attacks have heightened the need for mental health support, especially for children and people who live alone (IMC 27/12/2024; IOM accessed 16/02/2025). One key informant also observed that psychosocial support needs were higher among people who have returned from displacement in safer areas, as they may have lost their resilience for coping with daily shelling and attacks (KII 10/02/2025).

Livelihoods

There are high needs in terms of job creation in Khersonska oblast. The outflow or closure of businesses and many industrial facilities (including the oil harbour in Kherson) has created a scarcity of job opportunities (CARE 12/02/2025). People who are employed work mainly for the public sector, humanitarian organisations, or small businesses in Kherson, such as coffee shops and grocery stores (KII 10/02/2025). The restoration of employment and businesses was the second-highest need for a community expressed by residents of Khersonska oblast in a Transatlantic Dialogue Center survey in June 2024 (TDC 02/07/2024). People of preretirement age (ages 50–59), who can only rely on unemployment benefits for up to one year, and who, in most cases, do not fall within a category of vulnerability that qualifies for humanitarian assistance, are in a particularly difficult situation if they are unemployed (TDC 02/07/2024; HMH 21/10/2024).

The war has also affected agriculture, which a third of working-age people in Khersonska oblast rely on for a living (USAID/DRC 06/12/2024; Caritas 31/10/2024; KII 10/02/2025). Many families use subsistence farming to meet their consumption needs (USAID/DRC 06/12/2024; WFP 09/07/2024). Despite demining efforts, landmine and ERW contamination is a major constraint for farmers: 30% of respondents to a Danish Refugee Council study said that they had either been forced to reduce the amount of land they cultivated or stop their agricultural activities completely because of ERW (USAID/DRC 06/12/2024).

40% of the oblast population, or 60,000 people, are above 60 years of age. In Khersonska oblast, pensioners receive average payments of UAH 4,968 (approximately USD 120) – 14% lower than the national average (UAH 5,816, approximately USD 140) and substantially lower than the national monthly subsistence minimum in Ukraine (UAH 7,065, approximately USD 170) (Intent 30/01/2025). This is a result of low salaries during employment, as pension in Ukraine depends on an individual's average salary. A key informant noted that to supplement insufficient pensions, older people often rely on humanitarian assistance, such as food kits and hygiene items, or on remittances sent by relatives who have been displaced to other oblasts or abroad (KII 10/02/2025).

In order to sustain a living with such a low or no income, people often rely on cheaper goods or personal farming, which don't meet their needs (CARE 12/02/2025). Since November 2022, various cash assistance programmes by humanitarian organisations have partially mitigated livelihood challenges. One of the biggest of such programmes was a cash assistance programme by an INGO, which provided cash as well as food and basic item vouchers to many of the most economically vulnerable people across the oblast. The USAID-funded programme was suspended and then terminated in February, however, because of the recent suspension of US aid (KII 14/02/2025).

Education

Khersonska oblast is the third most affected oblast in terms of damage to education facilities after Donetsk and Kharkivska oblasts. By December, there were 150 schools and 111 kindergartens destroyed in the oblast, disrupting education for many children, even though 90% of them continue to attend school online (Radio Svoboda 20/12/2024; TDC 02/07/2024). The restoration of damaged institutions is progressing gradually, though financial constraints and increased attacks have slowed its pace. Some communities have already developed plans to rebuild educational facilities and are setting up shelters to support a blended learning format. About one-third of children from low-income families lack access to high-speed internet and a personal device, such as a laptop or tablet, signifying unequal access to education (TDC 02/07/2024).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Between September 2024 and January 2025, Khersonska oblast had the second-highest number of publicly reported incidents targeting or affecting humanitarian personnel, facilities, or assets (14 compared to 19 in Donetsk oblast) (ACAPS accessed 13/03/2024). The high number of incidents in Khersonska oblast, including the killing of three humanitarians, is the product of the high levels of drone and artillery attacks on the oblast, including attacks on civilian premises and infrastructure (ACAPS accessed 13/03/2024; Ukrainska Pravda 03/12/2024; KII 10/02/2025).

Since April 2024, oblast authorities have required prior coordination for humanitarian access to the oblast, but there is no information to indicate that this poses an additional access constraint (ACAPS 29/07/2024). Safety and security are the main drivers of access constraints for humanitarian responders, particularly since areas closest to the river are within range of short-range FPV drones and artillery. Many humanitarian organisations have their own safety and security procedures banning employees from accessing frontline areas. For the organisations we consulted, the self-imposed no-entry zone varied from 10–30km from the front line (KII 04/02/2025; KII 12/02/2025; KII 14/02/2025). Local government responders and volunteers deliver humanitarian assistance within these zones (KII 31/01/2025). Because of intensive shelling, rocket, and drone attacks, the local government banned entry to Kherson city for humanitarian responders in December, later lifting the ban in January (ACAPS 06/02/2025; KII 28/01/2025; KII 14/02/2025).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Poverty and livelihood crisis

Khersonska oblast is one of the poorest oblasts in Ukraine, with poverty rates worse than they were at the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, which aggravates humanitarian needs within the oblast (Cherenko 22/11/2024). In the IOM General Population Survey conducted from October–December 2024, 84% of the respondents in Khersonska oblast reported that their monthly family income per person was less than UAH 7,065² (USD 170) – the highest ratio of people with an income below the monthly subsistence minimum among all 15 surveyed oblasts (IOM 17/01/2025). In a Caritas survey conducted in ten oblasts in October 2024, respondents from Khersonska oblast had the lowest average monthly income per person (UAH 3,513 or USD 84) (Caritas 31/10/2024). The main reason for the low income is unemployment, with Khersonska oblast having the highest unemployment rate (19–22%, compared to 5% before the full-scale invasion and the current 14% countrywide unemployment rate) among all oblasts (IOM 21/11/2024; Zakhyst 01/2025; RBC-Ukraine 20/01/2025).

Several factors make finding new employment in Khersonska oblast challenging. These include a high level of insecurity, business closures or relocations, and a limited job market (USAID/DRC 06/12/2024; DRC accessed 14/02/2025). Many job seekers also lack the necessary skills, and opportunities for retraining are scarce because of the limited number of training centres and insufficient funding for skills development (USAID/DRC 06/12/2024; KII 12/02/2025). Skills shortages have been reported across almost all work sectors in Kherson, with education, healthcare, retail, and transport particularly affected (NikVesti 31/01/2025). Another major concern impeding access to work for men is fear of mobilisation, as they are required to register with the army recruitment centre when starting a new job or accessing state employment services, including retraining programmes (USAID/DRC 06/02/2024). Even when employment is available and accessible, low wages contribute to families' risk of poverty, particularly in rural areas where salaries are around UAH 5,500 (USD 132) or less, compared to UAH 7,000–12,000 (USD 168–USD 289) in urban areas (while the average salary for the whole country is approximately UAH 20,000, USD 481) (USAID/DRC 06/02/2024; UNN 09/12/2024).

An additional factor hampering people's access to livelihoods is a lack of access to farmland. Over 30% of agricultural workers face limited livelihood access and poverty because of unsafe farming conditions caused by shelling, artillery attacks, and landmine contamination (Caritas 31/10/2024; USAID/DRC 06/12/2024). Despite the demining of approximately 60% of all contaminated areas in Khersonska oblast, the landmines have not been cleared from areas in proximity of up to 20km from the front line (NikVesti 21/01/2025; Suspilne 10/02/2025; KII 18/02/2025).

² Monthly subsistence minimum in Ukraine by July 2024

Returns

Despite the lack of security and other conditions ensuring sustainable return, hundreds of thousands of people have moved back to the frontline oblasts, including frontline towns (IMPACT Initiatives 02/01/2025; REACH 11/01/2025; IOM 26/12/2024). In Khersonska oblast, an estimated 48,7000 returnees were present in the 15 Ukrainian-controlled hromadas assessed (out of 17) by December 2024 (IOM Mobility and Needs Assessment Round 12 November–December 2024). Returns to Khersonska oblast started soon after Ukrainian forces retook Kherson and other cities at the right bank of the Dnipro River in November 2022 (RBC-Ukraine 11/11/2024; Life in War 31/05/2024). Media outlets have reported more recent returns to Kherson city and other cities, potentially driven by challenges in finding accommodation or livelihood opportunities in areas of displacement and, to a lesser extent, by loss of access to IDP allowance following a tightening of the eligibility criteria in March 2024 (RBC-Ukraine 11/11/2024; Vgoru 06/08/2024 and 18/05/2024; IOM 19/09/2024; Protection Cluster 10/05/2024; TKI 04/01/2025). Following the changes to Resolution 332 on IDP allowance implemented in March 2024, approximately 60% of IDPs (1.4 million people) lost the allowance because they did not fulfil the new eligibility criteria (IOM 19/09/2024). This has put many people under financial strain and, for many who did not have another source of income, contributed to their decision to return (DRC 21/11/2024; TKI 04/01/2025). By January 2025, approximately 440,000 of the people displaced from territory in Khersonska oblast under GoU control were staying in other oblasts (Ukrinform 28/01/2025; IOM 17/01/2025).

After the retaking of Kherson and other areas on the right bank of the Dnipro River, there have been some government measures encouraging the repopulation of areas retaken from Russian forces, including by prioritising the restoration of houses, infrastructure, and farmland (by providing subsidies to farmers) and incentivising the opening of businesses to create jobs in Khersonska oblast (GoU 10/04/2024; Ukraine Crisis Media Center 16/10/2024; Agropolit 18/03/2024; Intent 31/10/2024). According to key informants, there are also seasonal trends in terms of displaced people temporarily returning to their houses in Khersonska oblast, especially from Mykolaivska and Odeska oblasts, during spring and summer, security permitting, to check on their properties, plant crops, and make minor repairs. The majority of those who returned last summer remained in the oblast, and are likely facing heightened needs, as their savings have been depleted with the war entering its fourth year (KII 10/02/2025; KII 03/02/2025).

Termination of USAID funding

A vast number of government institutions and humanitarian organisations in Ukraine were affected by the US foreign assistance suspension announced in January and the cancellation announced in March (WH 20/01/2025; AP 10/03/2025). With 83% of USAID contracts terminated globally, it is still not known how many of them were cancelled in Ukraine (TKI 10/03/2025; Kyiv Post 27/01/2025). Since the onset of the full-scale war, USAID provided USD 2.6 billion in humanitarian aid, USD 5 billion in development assistance, and more than USD 30 billion in direct budget support to Ukraine (TKI 31/01/2025; CNN 17/02/2025). In 2024, the US provided 28% of tracked humanitarian aid for Ukraine, making the US the largest single donor (but surpassed by the EU if countries and EU institutions are combined) (OCHA accessed 19/02/2025).

In Khersonska oblast, the suspension and then termination of US aid have affected critical infrastructure restoration, healthcare provision, and a range of development and humanitarian programmes (EPravda 29/01/2025). One example with a potentially huge impact on livelihoods in Khersonska oblast is the cancellation of a large cash assistance programme by a humanitarian organisation. This programme provided cash vouchers to more than 50,000 people in 2024 alone (KII 14/02/2025). For another organisation, the initial suspension affected two projects: one aimed at house repairs and another at assistance for IDPs (KII 10/02/2025). Other key informants were hesitant to share internal information about their operations.