UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency Ukraine

JULY 2026

UKRAINE | WINTER RESPONSE PLAN 2026-2027

A Russian attack last winter damaged Liudmyla's windows and balcony, and left her building in Kharkiv without electricity for an extended period during freezing temperatures. © UNHCR/Yevheniia Kozun

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

- Winter 2025-2026 was particularly harsh in Ukraine. A report by the UN HRMMU found that **Russian Armed Forces systematically and repeatedly targeted energy facilities across Ukraine throughout the 2025-2026 winter months** – with electricity generation, transmission and distribution facilities hit at least 423 times between October 2025 and March 2026, including 48 coordinated attacks that targeted three or more regions using multiple types of weapons. These attacks triggered emergency electricity outages, affecting millions of civilians across the country, and disrupted critical utilities to hundreds of thousands of people, leaving many without heating and hot water as temperatures fell below -20°C in the coldest winter in Ukraine since 2010. The impact of these outages was particularly severe for people living in multi-story buildings and for people with reduced mobility, including older persons and persons with disabilities.
- The REACH Cold Spots Risk Assessment for the 2026-2027 winter season found that **the highest levels of risk remain concentrated in the north-east and east of Ukraine**, particularly across Kharkivska, Sumska, Donetska, and Kyivska oblasts, where colder winter conditions overlap with war intensity, proximity to active hostilities or the Russian border, displacement, infrastructure disruption, and cumulative damage to electricity, water, and heating systems. Compared to previous years, winter-related vulnerability is increasingly shaped not only by proximity to the frontline, but also by broader energy-system disruption affecting large urban and densely populated areas. The REACH assessment highlights the growing importance of large urban areas – including cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Dnipro – where disruptions to electricity, heating, water, and communication systems may affect large numbers of people. Meanwhile, parts of Khersonska, Zaporizka, and Odeska oblasts in southern Ukraine also demonstrate winter-related vulnerability linked to war exposure, infrastructure disruption, and utility outages.
- UNHCR's border monitoring found that **the lack of basic services also influenced people's decisions to flee abroad last winter**. People leaving Ukraine started citing lack of electricity, water, and heating among the top reasons for leaving in September 2025. In December 2025, January and February 2026, around 75% of people who left mentioned either lack of electricity, water or heating. About one-third of respondents who left Ukraine in January and February 2026 said that stabilization of the electricity situation was a main factor influencing a future return decision.

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE

$104 million overall financial requirements for UNHCR's 2026-2027 winter response

Implemented in partnership with national NGOs, in coordination with the **Government of Ukraine**, & as part of the broader Inter-agency Winter Response Plan

310,550 people to receive cash assistance for winter-specific needs

$80 million

78,000 people to be supported with better insulated homes and living spaces

$23 million

47,100 people to receive protection winter support

$1 million

- As millions of people in Ukraine brace themselves for **the fifth winter since the Russian full-scale invasion** and the prospect of continued large-scale attacks against Ukraine's energy infrastructure, **UNHCR is planning to deliver critical assistance to help war-affected people stay safe and warm in their homes.** UNHCR will deliver its winter assistance **in complementarity to the response by the Government of Ukraine** and in **close coordination with partners as part of the broader** 2026-2027 inter-agency winter response plan, prioritizing war-affected people with specific vulnerabilities. **Early investments** in winter assistance remain crucial. The timely delivery of winter assistance before the coldest months set in is critical if people are to remain safe and warm in their homes and avoid being forced to relocate as temperatures drop.

MAIN RESPONSE AREAS | 2026-2027 WINTER RESPONSE

1. CASH ASSISTANCE FOR WINTER NEEDS - $80 million

The 2026-2027 UNHCR winter cash assistance response will contribute to a coordinated hybrid delivery model that combines support to nationally led assistance mechanisms with continued direct humanitarian cash delivery. Developed in close coordination with the **Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity (MoSPFU),** this approach seeks to **strengthen Government ownership and longer-term systems alignment** while preserving the operational flexibility required to address urgent winter-related humanitarian needs in frontline areas. Under the hybrid delivery model, the MoSPFU will assist people already enrolled in other Government programmes, and therefore registered with the Pension Fund of Ukraine (PFU), with winter cash assistance funded through the Humanitarian and Resilience Account (HRA).

In complementarity, **UNHCR will deliver winter cash assistance directly** to people not covered through the HRA, in line with the established coordination of the Shelter/NFI Cluster. Direct humanitarian cash delivery ensures continued speed, flexibility, and surge capacity, particularly for households not covered by state-administered assistance, those affected by registration or administrative barriers and households requiring immediate support in a rapidly evolving operational context. This hybrid approach will promote greater Government ownership while ensuring a comprehensive and effective response. At the same time, the coexistence of both delivery modalities supports a gradual transition towards stronger Government leadership in frontline response areas and reinforces complementarity between Government and humanitarian actors. It also creates an important entry point for establishing referral pathways for households outside PFU schemes, supporting their potential future inclusion in Government registries and contributing to the strengthening of a more shock responsive social protection system over time.

The transfer value of the winter assistance for the 2026-2027 winter response is **UAH 19,400** per household, in line with the Shelter/NFI Cluster recommendations. RAIS+, a UNHCR-developed and managed tool, will be used as the coordination platform to support inter-agency planning and complementary coverage across partners, harmonizing registration processes and ensuring deduplication of assistance.

310,550 people to receive cash assistance for winter needs

2. SHELTER & HOUSING - $23 million

UNHCR will be maintaining core shelter and housing programming, expanding on last winter's successful pilot projects, and adding a new activity with the overall objective of **supporting families to improve the thermal comfort of their homes**. These interventions align with UNHCR's objective to address winter needs in a sustainable manner and invest in communities' **long-term resilience to sustain harsh winter conditions** in Ukraine. It incorporates the principle of **"build back better"**, with sustainable repair and insulation works involving a comprehensive transformation of buildings to improve their energy efficiency, environmental friendliness and compliance towards European standards.

In line with this approach, UNHCR's upcoming winter response will focus on four areas: **(1) the distribution of "Rapid Thermal Kits"** for private houses, apartments and collective sites consisting of heaters and materials used by families to insulate their homes, such as reflective insulation screens, transparent plastic sheets, foam strips, and building tape; **(2) the repair and insulation of sub-standard homes and living spaces** through national contractor-led repairs; **(3) communal interventions to improve the thermal comfort of homes and living spaces**, including the insulation of façades and attics in multi-storey buildings and the insulation of heating pipes; and **(4) the provision, installation and repair of solid fuel stoves for vulnerable families** in frontline and hard-to-reach areas where access to electricity is a challenge. These interventions will help improve the overall capacity of buildings and homes to retain warmth, reduce heating costs and save energy.

78,000 people to be supported with better insulated homes and living spaces

3. PROTECTION - $1 million

Informed by the experience of last winter and the large number of people impacted by infrastructure disruption in urban areas, UNHCR this year plans to **(1) expand its network of social facilitators in affected urban centres and frontline communities** to enhance outreach, basic social support, and information provision, as well as provide mental health and psychosocial support, to vulnerable groups who are at heightened risk during winter during prolonged power, heating and water outages. This includes older people and people with disabilities stranded without family supports in high-rise buildings without heating or electricity. In addition this winter, UNHCR will **(2) ensure robust capacity of its helpline feedback mechanism** to respond to queries during the winter season and make relevant referrals, and **(3) provide alternative energy units such as portable power stations** to selected institutions providing critical social services, as well as to critical communal infrastructure, in close cooperation with the MoSPFU, local authorities, community-based organizations, and partners.

Complementing UNHCR's winter response, through its regular programming, UNHCR and partners will continue to provide legal assistance and social accompaniment to individuals facing administrative and legal barriers to accessing state social protection systems. UNHCR will leverage its existing network of legal aid partners, social workers, and community-based organizations to enhance outreach and referral mechanisms, helping to reduce barriers to accessing social services.

47,100 people to receive protection winter support

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SUMMARY FINDINGS | POST DISTRIBUTION MONITORING 2025-2026 WINTER RESPONSE

Post distribution monitoring (PDM) is a core-component of UNHCR's ongoing effort to ensure accountability to those we serve and our donors, understand the impact of our interventions, and to adapt and improve our response in future. Key findings have been crucial in informing the 2026-2027 winter response planning.

WINTER CASH ASSITANCE

Monitoring of UNHCR's winter cash assistance response 2025-2026 highlights the **relevance**, **timeliness** and **impact** of cash assistance in helping people stay warm during the colder winter months. The PDM results also highlight the **protective role of winter cash assistance** in sustaining families in close proximity to the frontline where they wish to stay. Key findings include:

- **Preferred modality**: Recipients overwhelmingly preferred cash as the main form of winter support (90%), 6% preferred a combination of cash and in-kind support, and only 3% preferred in kind assistance alone.
- **Meets identified needs**: 91% of surveyed recipients used the cash assistance to purchase firewood or other heating fuel, and for 87% of respondents, heating fuel was the single largest spending item, confirming strong alignment with the programme's winter energy objective.
- **Delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, & participatory manner**: 95% of beneficiaries were satisfied with the process of receiving winter cash, and 99% felt safe receiving, keeping and spending the cash.
- **Improved living conditions & wellbeing**: 88% reported improved living conditions and 77% reported reduced stress.
- **Market resilience**: In almost all cases (96%), the goods and services that beneficiaries needed to buy were available in local markets.
- **Significant needs remain**: 54% of respondents reported that the fuel purchased was not enough for the full winter season, underlining the continued economic pressure faced by households.

Read the full winter cash assistance PDM report here.

WINTER SHELTER & HOUSING SUPPORT

- **Winter-related shelter and housing interventions demonstrated particularly strong PDM results**, with insulation materials, repairs, and Rapid Thermal Kits (RTKs) receiving **positive quality ratings of over 90%** across most PDM categories, and most importantly, helping households maintain **warmer and more dignified living conditions** throughout winter.
- **Insulation repairs delivered strong quality and improved the thermal comfort of people's homes**, with 89% of respondents rating the quality of works and materials positively, 91% were satisfied with the workers' professionalism, and 95% reported at least a fair improvement in living conditions, including enhanced thermal comfort. Construction materials assistance received particularly positive feedback, with 95% of respondents rating thermal insulation positively, 93% rating metal-plastic windows positively, and 100% reporting improved thermal insulation and overall housing conditions.
- **RTKs continue to be highly relevant in responding to people's winter needs**, with 84% of respondents satisfied with the quality of materials, and 91% considering the assistance useful for improving insulation and comfort during the cold season. Distribution and monitoring processes were also found to be effective, demonstrating the feasibility, relevance and relatively high impact of this low-cost programme.
- **UNHCR successfully piloted a range of energy-efficiency interventions last winter**, including attic insulation, façade insulation, insulation of heating pipes, and the provision of solid fuel heating solutions. These interventions demonstrated positive operational results and confirmed their feasibility in war-affected settings, contributing to improved thermal comfort, more efficient use of heating resources, and enhanced resilience of vulnerable households during the winter period. A technical assessment which modelled the impact of different energy-efficiency measures concluded that these priority interventions achieve the greatest impact in terms of reducing energy demand and heat losses and maintaining adequate indoor temperatures.

Read the full winter shelter & housing PDM report here.

Like thousands of residents in frontline areas of Ukraine, Ievhenia received cash assistance from UNHCR last winter to help cover expenses for solid fuel or pay increased energy bills during the winter months. She lives in Hlukhiv in Sumy region, around 10 kilometres from the border with the Russian Federation. With UNHCR's winter cash assistance support, she was able to buy enough firewood last year ahead of the cold season to keep her house warm, including during long hours of power outages.

"For pensioners like me who have a very little income, this assistance is indispensable. Without it, to be able to buy wood and stay warm, I would have needed to save money by cutting other spending, for example for purchasing medicines or food," Ievhenia said. "I live on my own and can rely only on pension benefits which means I can only afford to buy the most essential items." © UNHCR/Iryna Tymchyshyn

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Visit Ukraine's **Operational Data Portal** for more information products here.
- **Ukraine Protection Cluster Response Dashboard** can be found here.
- **Shelter/NFI Cluster Response Dashboard** here.

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Contact UNHCR's Hotline 0-800-307-711 for feedback and advice on assistance and services.