

The consequences of power outages, and factors contributing to social resilience

October 2025 | Ukraine

Key Messages

- **Power outages continue to be a risk in Ukraine.** Though nationwide rolling blackouts like in previous years were not seen for most of 2025, air strikes and bad weather have continued to cause outages. Power outages can be a fact of life nearer to the frontline. By October, outage schedules had been introduced regionally.
- **There is a general feeling of resilience, gained through experience and mitigations like generators, good civil protection processes, and communication between responders and the public.** However, these mitigations can all be disrupted or overwhelmed by a crisis scenario. They require upkeep.
- **The complex nature of power outages means they are difficult to prepare for.** There are existing mitigations, which international partners can bolster by being familiar with civil protection processes and making strategic investments.

Context & Rationale

The objective of the Winter Response Plan is that “the most vulnerable people are protected from cold weather in winter through the provision of multisectoral critical aid and services.”¹

However, the plan identifies a “key gap” with regards to “the impact of electricity outages and energy infrastructure damage to inform prioritisation of the response for the most vulnerable people in urban and rural areas/cities”.

REACH intends this research to contribute towards addressing this gap.

Although power outages are an acute risk in winter, infrastructure damage is a long-term issue, and resilience offers benefits year round.

Assessment Overview

This factsheet brings together primary interviews with secondary analysis. In the course of research from July to September 2025, REACH:

- interviewed 33 key informants with a semi-structured survey.
- held focus groups involving 31 residents affected by power cuts.
- interviewed nine people in frontline villages with a semi-structured survey.
- reviewed relevant legislation and documentation governing emergency response.
- reviewed existing research on power outages in Ukraine and internationally.
- consulted with subject matter experts.

More information about methodology is provided on page 7.

A longer report will be published with further discussion and analysis of primary and secondary data.

Power outages in general

Power outages are socially and technologically complex phenomena. There are a variety of possible causes, each with its own consequences and remedies.

The UNDRR notes that “[t]erminology and definitions may vary, even significantly, across operational contexts and agencies”.² Even the definition of a “long-duration” outage is not clear, ranging from “several hours to days or even weeks”.³

Although it is difficult to define power outages succinctly, it is important to consider how to respond, well in advance. Indeed, the consequences of a power outage, such as failed telecommunications and halted transportation, can seriously hamper the coordination of the response in the moment.

The consequences of power outages can be interpreted in terms of cascades.⁴ These can be technological or social. Technological cascades can include failures on telecommunications masts or water pumps. Social cascades

Power outages in Ukraine

Since 2015, Ukraine has experienced power outages due to cyber attacks, severe weather and air strikes.^{6 7}

Power outages provoked by infrastructure damage have occurred since 2022.⁸ There were high-profile, nationwide rolling blackouts in winter 2022/23 and summer 2024.

The 2024/2025 winter did not see a worst-case scenario of rolling blackouts.⁹ However, there were localised power outages provoked by air strikes or adverse weather.

Some villages and towns in Ukraine are disconnected and cannot be reconnected due to conflict-driven access constraints. In some cases, these settlements have been disconnected since 2022.

REACH’s reporting indicates that power outages are a feature of life in settlements within 50km of the frontline.¹⁰ 68% of 256 settlements

can include demoralisation or inability to complete normal activities. In a scheduled outage, key facilities can be protected, reducing cascades.

Cascades link. For example, not being able to cook, make card payments, or access digital medical records each cross the technological with the social.

A power outage affects the whole of society, though some people or institutions are affected more quickly, or more severely. The response to a power outage will depend on its scale and duration. The wider the outage, and the longer it lasts, the more complex the needs may be.

The response may require agencies to work together, including going beyond normal ways of working. Remits can be unclear, compared with business as usual.

The public may respond in different ways. Even in the same incident, some people may be able to adapt relatively easily, whilst others are badly affected.

surveyed for Humanitarian Situation Monitoring in May 2025 had reportedly experienced power outages in the previous 30 days. For 23%, this was daily.

Official messaging ahead of the 2025/26 “heating season” indicated that Ukraine’s electricity grid would be able to handle winter demand without the need for scheduled blackouts.^{11 12}

However, the statements also acknowledged that this assessment was contingent on the infrastructure not being damaged further.

Cascade:

“[t]he dynamics present in disasters, in which [...] an initial impact can trigger other phenomena that lead to consequences with significant magnitudes”.⁴

Human factors:

Academic commentary points to a tendency for analysts and planners to focus on the “engineering perspective”, whilst “disregard[ing] the social dimension” of a power outage and the impact on individuals.³

When the “human factor” is considered, it may only be as a *cause* of disaster, with “less attention placed on ‘how people feel in such situations’”.⁵

Military analysts, United Nations reports, and statements by politicians all indicate that energy infrastructure is being targeted as of September 2025.^{13 14 15 16} In October, the mayor of Kharkiv stated that he anticipated that “the coming winter will be the hardest for Kharkiv in all years of the war”.¹⁷

In October 2025, Odesa suffered a large power outage following a severe storm.¹⁸ The same week, Chernihivska introduced a schedule after energy facilities were struck.¹⁹ Attacks were sustained over a week, and other oblasts faced outages too.^{20 21 22}

Other literature:

Power outages have been written about in the Ukrainian context. They have also been studied internationally.

There are useful reports covering the general situation and consequences for protection, agriculture, healthcare, education and people living with disabilities in Ukraine. There are also reports covering the development of the situation in the Ukrainian energy sector.^{3 4 5 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32}

Power outages in Ukraine's Code of Civil Protection

Ukraine has a developed Code of Civil Protection.³³ There is associated legislation and documentation for specific circumstances and sectors.³⁴
35 36

Emergencies of various kinds are defined in terms of their causes and consequences. This includes twelve specific definitions concerned with power outages.³⁵

Emergencies are also classified at four levels:

- On-site
- Local
- Regional
- State

The Code of Civil Protection further specifies four working regimes:

- Day-to-day operation
- High-alert
- Emergency
- State of emergency.

At the local and regional level, the response is governed by a "Response Plan".³⁷ The wartime state of emergency may also mean that there are special powers in place locally.

A "high-alert" period can, for example, be triggered by a forecast of bad weather, which could knock out the electrical grid.

These documents are relatively

generic. They specify the distinct roles during the different working regimes of an emergency response.

The documents also affirm how agencies will coordinate across their competencies to resolve the consequences of the disaster.

The formally-defined thresholds may mean that not all power outages are classified as "emergencies".

For example, power outages can be scheduled for maintenance work. Even unplanned outages can be confined to a small area, or be resolved relatively quickly and within normal budgets.

Nevertheless, even when these situations remain "under control", the public will be affected to some degree.

Important actors during response to a powercut:

The most important actors will depend on the specific situation and local governance. However, in general, these can include:

- Executive branch of the local government council
- Commission on Technogenic and Environmental Safety and Emergencies (local or regional)
- Regional branch of the State Emergency Services of Ukraine
- Regional branch of the affected energy company
- Regional military authority
- Starosta (sub-Hromada-level local authority representatives)
- Social and health workers
- Staff in an Invincibility Point

"I think that after all the training that I talked about, which took place in December 2023, and according to its results (the clarification of response plans, the development of response plans, and the interaction of services with each other, and the further use of skills in practice) it gave its advantages and results. [...]"

Taking this opportunity, I would still like to thank the heads of territorial communities, and the heads of agricultural enterprises of the district, all the services that were involved in the elimination of these consequences for their prompt and coordinated work. I think that [...] we managed to quickly eliminate the consequences of bad weather and return the entire district, all territorial communities, all life support systems, critical infrastructures to normal operation."

Deputy head of a raion administration, Mykolaiivska oblast, reflecting on the power outage in January 2024.

How power outages affect people

In interviews with REACH, people described a range of consequences that follow on from power outages.

Two problems stood out. These were loss of access to water, and failing telecommunications.

It was generally reported that water and communications can be affected within hours. This depends on the area; there are no general statistics for this. Once offline, they can trigger further cascades, for example in healthcare.

In the case of telecommunications, masts cannot broadcast mobile signal and routers cannot deliver internet.

For water, it is first of all pumping which is affected. This can affect centralised systems in the settlement, wells, and plumbing within buildings. The wider literature documents other problems that will arise over the longer term, for example with water treatment and disposal.⁵

Participants also pointed to problems that can follow on from disruptions to water and telecommunications.

Without water flow, household activities become much more difficult. Aside from hygiene, heating is affected. Even if a building has central heating, it will not be possible for the boiler to pump heated water through radiators unpowered. In the case of district heating, the hot water cannot be supplied to the building, either. This has implications both for households and institutions.

Without telecommunications, many aspects of normal life are affected. Shop-floor and office work are affected. Administrative tasks are also affected. This can be consequential for vulnerable people, constraining social work or access to medical records.

The loss of telecommunications also affects the response itself. It is more difficult for responders to coordinate, and also for them to communicate information to the public.

Healthcare was another prominent concern. Medical equipment relies on electricity. However, there was often a perception that healthcare can be assured, if there are working generators.

Participant A: "If there is no electricity, then the water supply often does not work. The pump does not pump, there is no water. There are queues at wells, that say you can't drink [from them]."

Participant B: "It can be drunk, but boiled. And you can't boil, because there is no electricity."

- Focus group discussion, Kharkiv

"Heating in houses also depends on electricity. There is a motor that drives water. If the lights are turned off, then even if the heating is gas, it will not function. [...] If there is no electricity, then there will be no heat."

- Social worker, Kharkivska

The main problem is the lack of mobile communication as a result of a power outage. [...] At the end of 2022, several districts of the city were left completely without communication. Someone drove their car to the fire station to say that their apartment was on fire."

- Department of Emergency Situations at Kharkiv City Council

What has been learnt over the years

Participants reflected on how the situation has changed over the years, and gave insights from specific major incidents.

Overall, the usefulness of generators stood out across the interviews and discussions. The key informants discussing specific case studies made repeated references to the importance of generators and associated maintenance equipment. One described auditing facilities' electricity resilience after the incident.

Generators can be effective in addressing the cascades which stood out as most concerning.

For example, water pumping and telecommunications masts can both be assured if there is an alternative local source of electricity. Even if household heating and use of appliances cannot be assured,

generators in public hubs can help to provide relief for affected people.

Generators can be private or public. Some of the local authority workers involved in the responses in Odesa, Mykolaivska and Kirovohradka referred to allocating reserved generators, whilst others commented on the stock of generators which are already installed. For example, social institutions and businesses alike have invested in generators and other back-up power. In some cases, equipment was also lent to the response, for example by farmers.

Aside from ensuring there is a stock of accessible generators, reflections from the case study interviews suggest two important strategic goals.

The first was to do with keeping telecommunications working. This was described as an urgent response task.

It is important both to help inform the public, and to coordinate tasks.

The second was to ensure there is capacity in the social response. For example, that hubs are equipped to provide comfort.

The importance of communication with the public was also reflected on. The expectations of local government key informants and residents in focus groups appeared quite well-aligned, mentioning similar modalities.

The exact communication strategy will depend on the area and incident. In more rural focus groups, people joked with each other, announcing "let's go to the mayor!" to fix problems during the outage, or naming specific local authority workers they would talk to. In Kharkiv, the participants described using the public hotline, 1562.³⁸

How people and institutions have already adapted

Whilst participants did describe a range of negative consequences that arise from power outages, it is important to recognise how things have changed since 2022.

Even during the interviews concerned with complex, multi-day power outages, key informants referred to situations where there was no cascade, or its effect was limited.

This was also the case amongst the more general discussions with key informants in Kharkivska and Chernihivska. There was a sense in the interviews that this was because there were good mitigations in place, and people had learnt how to manage.

It was a refrain in the focus group discussions, that people know better how to respond compared with at the start of the full scale invasion. People said that they take basic precautions, including carrying power banks and stocking up on battery-powered lights, candles and preserved food.

One adaptation is to simply do less. In one focus group discussion, participants said they do “nothing!” when there is a power outage. For

people who are healthy and relatively comfortable, the best choice can simply be to wait.

As will be seen below, there was a general sense amongst key informants that if key services can be secured, then working processes can be changed to fit the situation. Even water and telecommunications, which otherwise stood out as key concerns, were described as being unaffected in some cases.³⁹ Similarly, although hospitals are very critical, there was a sense across the interviews that they are prepared for short term outages.

Whilst participants did generally refer to positive adaptations that have been made, there were some concerns.

In three of the five focus groups, people expressed concern that people are less prepared than before. It was also mentioned in focus groups that this is class-based, as mitigations like backup power can be unaffordable.

Focus group participants were also quite pessimistic about the idea of a power outage which would last longer than a day. For example, they commented “there is nothing to talk

about” or “you can’t even prepare”.

One participant stated directly that they would be more concerned about this in the winter, because they would worry about heating their home.

“We all faced this at the beginning of the war, we just forgot it.”

- Resident, Kharkivska

“It was not only in Odesa that there was a problem, it was a general national problem. And in order to move this [patient] data, the algorithms of this electronic health care system even changed. [...] But this was not reflected in any way in the reception of patients, and they did not feel it.”

- Healthcare worker, Odesa

“I will not say that there was a supply there, for example, 100% [but] it was carried out, and in principle, people had water.”

- Raion administration, Mykolaivska

Factors that contribute to resilience

When key informants reflected on their response to power outages, there were many factors that appeared to be contributing to resilience. In the case study interviews, three topics stood out prominently.

Above all, there were many normative statements about the effectiveness and reliability of emergency response protocols. People referred to published response plans, and to practices that had become familiar through training and past experiences. People also spoke positively about their colleagues and workers from other agencies, when people performed their duties reliably, flexibly, or worked overtime.

Communicating with the public was also mentioned very prominently during the interviews. Information was reportedly shared across a range of media, including print and digital.

Examples were given of the local authorities proactively reaching out, for example by posting flyers in the entrances to buildings to inform people about services or the expected length of outages, or using dedicated social media channels.

Thirdly, the Invincibility Points were mentioned as an obvious part of the response.⁴⁰ Invincibility Points have been an express part of the government’s strategy, and were previously targeted in humanitarian programming.^{41 42}

The term appears to have taken on a broader significance, to mean any place where people can access generators, usually with basic comforts like seating and hot drinks or food. The widespread use of generators in the private sector was also seen as contributing to this resilience.

Some comments suggest that local authorities “deploy” such rest spaces during a response, for example making government offices publicly accessible.

In the more rural context, the starostas were referred to as a very important part of the response. They can contribute to both the multi-agency coordination, and to communication with the public.

Key informants also referred to the role of NGOs. This was in terms of both ordinary activities, and taking part in adhoc response.

Residents generally seemed to express positive opinions, that local government and energy companies work reliably to solve problems. As mentioned above, residents referred to steps they would take to seek information.

Factors that hamper resilience

Although the public and the state take steps to mitigate and prepare for power outages, there were reflections on specific challenges that can arise.

In the case study interviews, material challenges were relatively prominent. Key informants referred to missing key stock. Since generators are an important mitigation, it also followed that there were problems to do with their maintenance. Key informants

mentioned the availability of spare parts, or even fuel. This suggests issues in either financing or logistics during the response.

Ukraine has a challenging labour market. This was mentioned in these interviews. Key informants perceived that there were not always enough engineers available to fix problems.

Engineers and emergency responders

are endangered during wartime.⁴³ Key informants mentioned how difficult it is to work in a conflict area.

A limited funding landscape was also mentioned. One local authority worker mentioned not being able to make investments in energy generation. Another mentioned their perception that there is less international funding than in previous years.

Life in villages that are permanently disconnected

REACH organised field research in villages near to Lyman, in August 2025, through their partner Unity and Strength. Small numbers of people still live in these villages. Participants described the challenges of living in settlements near to the frontline which have been disconnected from the grid. Although participants referred to nearby villages being reconnected, the same had not been possible for Shchurove, Brusivka and Staryi Karavan.

The technological problems that residents faced were similar to those reported during shorter, emergency power outages. However, the social consequences were exacerbated by the duration of the disconnection, and the limited possibility for the connection to be restored.

The situation across these communities was marked by widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure, considerable security risks, and difficult dilemmas. The starosta for Shchurove estimated that “80%” of buildings were damaged, with a “0% recovery rate”. The participants described the situation as worsening, with buildings being damaged amidst “constant shelling”. Despite the difficult situation, six of the participants directly said they did not want to leave.

The electricity has been cut since 2022, according to participants. They referred to using generators, some of which have apparently been provided by the regional military administration.

However, the cost of running these generators is considerable, so people were budgeting their energy use. Participants described only using the generators for a short amount of time, and being selective about which appliances would be run off of them. The store owner said she had to pass the cost of her shop’s generator on to consumers through higher prices.

The lack of stable electricity was cascading to other utilities. Water was being accessed from wells, but pumping often required electricity. Without connection to the grid, the participants described not being able to use electric pumps. Instead, they said they were using hand pumps, or relying on bottled water. As in previous examples, participants mentioned not being able to use central heating because of the power outage.

The challenges in accessing water in turn meant that people were not able to water their vegetable gardens. Because of this, planting had reportedly reduced. One can infer that this would have affected people’s food security.

Telecoms were also affected by the outage. It was said that there was no mobile service. One resident described using the television to find out news. However, they also said that they did not keep the television on for long, to conserve fuel. This potentially reduces people’s awareness of the changing context.

“Before the war, we had a well, but it was powered by electricity.

When the electricity went out, the water disappeared.

We had to walk around the village and collect water from neighbors who had wells or hand columns. Then we took a hand pump for our well from the attic and installed it.”

- A resident of Shchurove

“For us, the most serious and tangible damage remains the lack of electricity and the destruction of the main bridge.

Support is especially urgently needed in the restoration of electricity - without it, the village will not be able to live and develop normally.”

- A resident of Staryi Karavan

“It is impossible to turn on the heating or use equipment. [...] which means that only stove heating remains.

If the power supply was restored, it would be much easier to survive the winter, especially for those who still have electric boilers or convectors.

In the meantime, we have to rely only on firewood and our own strength.”

- A resident of Staryi Karavan

Conclusion

Ukraine has faced serious power outages caused by hostile actions since before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. State agencies, local government workers, emergency services and the general public have become used to power outages since then. Through this experience, mitigations have been put in place, response plans have been tested, and strategic response priorities have been identified. Power outages have been less prominent in discourse than in previous years, but still an issue. The problems go beyond the energy sector, cascading into other services and affecting the whole of society. The exact dynamics of each power outage will depend on the cause, the duration, the extent, and the capacities to adapt or respond.

Concerns about water and telecommunications access were prominent, though any sector could be affected. Through qualitative interviewing, REACH has found that responders generally consider their processes to be effective and reliable. Resilience is created whenever alternative energy sources (particularly generators) can be deployed, and strengthened by good social networks, with proactive communication to the public. When they are available, Invincibility Points are seen as useful.

However, resilience can be reduced if these mitigations are not in place, or incomplete. Key informants reported concerns including staff and funding shortages. If a cascade is being prevented through generator use, this will be vulnerable to breakdowns or exhausted fuel reserves. In some frontline areas, there simply is no permanent electrical supply.

The consequences of power outages are complex and difficult to predict. Emergency outages can be sudden, whether caused by weather or conflict. Whilst power outages of less than one day can be difficult but manageable, the prospect of a longer outage is still daunting.

Strategic investments in the energy security of critical facilities and hubs affords societal resilience. Being well-integrated into emergency response frameworks helps responders to be available in a crisis.

Methodology Overview

Primary data collection was conducted in August and September 2025. There were two overall directions, exploring either the general situation, or specific case studies from the past.

In Kharkivska and Chernihivska, REACH conducted five focus group discussions with residents and fifteen key informant interviews with local authority workers, social workers and hospital managers, asking them to reflect on their overall experience of power cuts and their understanding of the current situation.

REACH also conducted seventeen key informant interviews about specific case studies. The profile of the key informants was similar, but included engineers. Seven participants recounted an incident in Odesa from 4th to approximately 10th February 2023.⁴⁴ This was a city wide power outage following a substation fire. Eleven participants recalled an incident in Mykolaiivska and Kirovohradska from 7th to approximately 9th January 2024, affecting hundreds of settlements and caused by severe weather.⁴⁵

REACH's partner, Unity and Strength, conducted fieldwork in Lymanska hromada. As part of a wider interview, nine local people reported on their problems with permanent power outages.

The research is qualitative, so inherently limited by the partial perspectives of participants and researchers. It is difficult for people to recall details of past events. The research is not able to draw conclusions about readiness for any specific sector.

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ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).



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