



UNICEF Ukraine Winter Response 2025-2026

APRIL 2026

1. Executive summary

Ukraine's 2025-2026 winter unfolded amid repeated attacks on energy and critical infrastructure, prolonged blackouts and major disruptions to heating, water, health and education services. Children were affected first and hardest: cold homes, interrupted learning, reduced access to health care, and rising strain on caregivers all combined to deepen severe existing vulnerabilities.

Against this backdrop, UNICEF scaled up its winter response and, in December 2025, expanded its winter appeal from US\$65 million to US\$100 million to address both immediate humanitarian needs and critical system resilience. This funding allowed UNICEF to reach over 1.5 million people including 255,000 children providing warmth in homes, schools and health facilities; ensuring the continued availability of water and sanitation; and extending life-saving support through Invincibility Points, social services and case management. The response remained strongly child-focused, combining household support with investments in the systems children rely on every day.

Table 1: Summary of final results

Sector	Target	Endline result	Progress
Frontline winter cash assistance	320,000 people including 145,000 children	189,271 people including 89,300 children (58,560 households)	59%
School winterization grants	1,500 schools and preschools reaching about 445,000 children	All 1,500 institutions received grants	100%
District heating and energy resilience	1.65 million people including 280,500 children	37 completed projects benefiting 1.5 million people including 255,000	91%
Health facility resilience	830,000 people including 141,000 children	694,140 people including 118,000 children in Odesa, Kharkiv, Sumy and Chernihiv benefitted from interim energy measures	84%

Note: While the winter plan was fully funded, the timing and nature of contributions meant that a portion of the funding supported preparedness activities for the forthcoming winter season.

2. Background

By late 2025, [1,224 attacks on energy infrastructure](#) had taken half of Ukraine's [electricity generation](#) and [gas production](#) offline. The combined effects disrupted district heating, water pumping, schools and health facilities. UNICEF's Vulnerable Families Insights Overview showed that winter pressures were acute on families across the country: Financial constraints were reported by nearly 80 per cent of respondents, followed by power outages (65 per cent) and security risks (33 per cent). Energy disruptions had widespread effects on daily life, contributing to social isolation, stress within families, and reduced ability to meet basic needs such as cooking, heating and hygiene. The same reporting also found that 58 per cent of parents said their children were facing learning difficulties often or very often, while [Education Cluster analysis](#) estimated that power and heating outages had disrupted 66 per cent of learning time between mid-January and mid-February.

The growing severity of the situation meant that UNICEF needed to respond at scale and household, institutional and community levels: Families needed direct support to keep children warm, but children also needed functioning schools, hospitals, water systems, heating networks and safe community spaces. UNICEF therefore pursued a layered approach. First, it delivered direct winter cash support to vulnerable households with children. Second, it invested in education, heating and health systems so that essential services could continue despite blackouts and conflict-related damage. Third, district heating systems were repaired and improved to return reliable heating for families. Together, these streams helped reduce the immediate impact of winter on children while reinforcing resilience for the months ahead.

3. Support to frontline families

Winter cash assistance

UNICEF's winter cash assistance programme supported the heating and energy needs of vulnerable and low-income households with children in frontline regions. In this context, cash assistance not only helped these families prepare for the harsh winter season, but also empowered them to make critical and dignified decisions to ensure their safety and well-being. Each household received a one-time transfer of US\$ 470 (UAH 19,400), aligned with the Shelter Cluster winterization recommendations. Targeting prioritized geographic proximity to the frontline and socio-economic vulnerabilities, focusing on low-income families, large families (with three or more children), children with disabilities, and single-headed families.

In total, UNICEF supported 58,560 households, covering 189,271 people including 89,300 children, with **winter cash assistance** as part of the 2025-2026 response. As the second largest winter cash actor (for the second year in a row), UNICEF accounted for an estimated one-third of the overall humanitarian winter cash response. Three out of four households received assistance in September and October, enabling them to adequately prepare for the harsh winter conditions. Winter cash assistance provided by UNICEF and the humanitarian community in Ukraine aims to complement the national social protection system, prioritizing vulnerable households in frontline communities whose social assistance is inadequate to cover all their heating and energy needs for the winter season.

In a **post-distribution monitoring** survey of winter cash beneficiaries, 99 per cent indicated they had either fully (86 per cent) or partially (13 per cent) spent the cash assistance on winter and heating needs, namely: utilities, including electricity and centralized heating (35 per cent), heating/solid fuel (27 per cent), and winter clothes and shoes for children (16 per cent). Of the UAH 19,400 cash transfer to households, almost 97 per cent was spent on winter-related items (UAH 18,725). An estimated 92 per cent of respondents reported that the winterization assistance was provided on time, and 92 per cent of families indicated that cash was their preferred modality for future winterization assistance (6 per cent had no preference, and 2 per cent preferred in-kind assistance). Finally, children's preparedness for winter increased significantly after receiving the cash support, from 41 to 90 per cent.

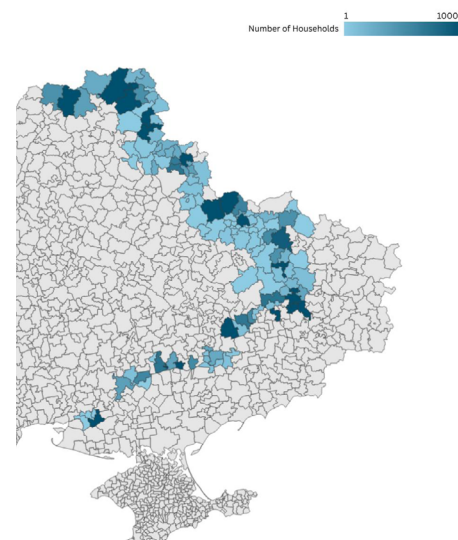


Table 2: Cash assistance by region

Region	Households	People	Children
Chernihiv	4,099	13,820	6,138
Dnipropetrovsk	9,760	30,893	14,655
Donetsk	10,861	34,239	15,595
Kharkiv	13,961	44,079	21,827
Kherson	5,596	19,172	8,022
Sumy	12,705	41,765	20,606
Zaporizhzhia	1,578	5,303	2,457
Total	58,560	189,271	89,300

Shock-responsive cash support and transition to government systems

As attacks on civil infrastructure led to widespread and prolonged disruptions in access to electricity, heating and water, UNICEF rapidly responded by launching a **shock-responsive cash programme** to support vulnerable families facing the compounded impacts of conflict and winter. The programme reached 26,594 people, including 15,898 children, in Odesa and Kharkiv City, providing a one-time emergency cash transfer of US\$ 95 (UAH 4,100) per person. UNICEF also supported 1,300 children with severe disabilities in Kyiv through the government's winter programme as a response to the energy crisis. Additionally, in March 2026, UNICEF signed an agreement with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity to expand the government's '**warm winter support**' programme to include 8,701 children with severe disabilities in nine frontline regions, who will receive a one-time cash transfer of UAH 6,500 (US\$ 150). Taken together, these programmes demonstrated that assistance can be delivered through local social protection departments, ensuring timely and well-targeted support while reinforcing national systems, strengthening institutional capacity, and advancing localization through government-led implementation.

Invincibility Points

Support to Invincibility Points became an important child-focused expansion of the winter response as conditions worsened in January and February. UNICEF expanded its existing partnership with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU), providing heating, power, hygiene, WASH and child-friendly supplies to allow [their network of 730 spaces](#) across the country to function more safely for children and caregivers during blackouts and severe cold.

In Kyiv and Odesa, UNICEF supported the opening of 12 Child Friendly Spaces in Invincibility Points in the most affected districts. Between 11 and 28 February, these spaces recorded 2,346 visits, including 1,528 by children. Seventy SESU psychologists were trained in crisis-focused child counselling and how to refer children and families for continued specialized support. Following this training, the psychologists delivered mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to 26,218 people (11,314 children) in Invincibility Points in Kyiv region.

'Stable heating points' in 40 designated schools in Kyiv and Chernihiv were also provided with similar supplies, and in 10 selected school psychologists supported to ensure MHPSS for 1,959 children. Participating children indicated that they felt happier, had opportunities to make new friends, and were able to engage more actively with their peers. School principals and psychologists also observed that primary school children were the group that benefited the most from the activities.

Social services, case management and continuity of care

UNICEF also expanded support to social service continuity for the most vulnerable children. In Kyiv, eight rehabilitation centres and 12 social service providers were equipped with power stations, power banks, blankets and other critical winter items, enabling services to continue during outages. As a result, 10,422 people, including 4,075 children, accessed quality services over the winter despite disruptions to heating or electricity supply.

Through partnerships with government and civil society, 34 additional social workers, case managers and psychologists were mobilized across 17 municipalities in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy and Kherson to support the regular social workforce. In total, 88 households, including 262 children, received case management and 2,562 people were reached with MHPSS, while 750 families, including 1,867 children received winterization items or vouchers. Across the winter period, social-service-related support also reached children in family-based care, children returning from occupied territories or the Russian Federation, and children in detention settings, helping preserve safety, dignity and access to care under exceptionally difficult conditions.



18 January 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine. A warming point set up by the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU)



11 January 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine. A young child sits at a table drawing and colouring inside a heated mobile "Point of Invincibility"

Winter safety communication

UNICEF's winter safety campaign complemented direct assistance with practical risk-reduction messages for children, parents and caregivers. Digital communication implemented jointly with SESU reached 878,744 people to reinforce behaviours that reduce cold-weather and blackout-related risks. Fifty thousand **high-visibility safety flickers** were delivered to children who can use them during prolonged darkness as blackouts decrease street illumination and pose additional risks to their safety.

4. Cash grants to schools and preschools

In the 2025–2026 academic year, UNICEF, in close partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, supported educational institutions through cash grants aimed at strengthening the heating and energy resilience of educational facilities to ensure uninterrupted access to education. In line with these objectives, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, through [Decree №1713](#) dated 19 December 2025, has identified the following priority areas for the grants:

- Strengthening autonomous heating systems in educational facilities.
- Ensuring an independent electricity supply for schools and preschools.
- Improving the thermal resilience of educational buildings.
- Purchase, delivery, and storage of fuel for boiler rooms and heating systems of educational institutions.

A total of 1,500 preschool and general secondary education institutions operating in face-to-face or blended formats have each received **cash grants of UAH 420,000** (US\$ 10,000). The project is benefitting 445,000 children across the Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia regions. Grants were accompanied by a series of webinars on eligible use funds, common questions, reporting and safe use of solid fuel boilers.

Table 3: Cash grants per region

Region	Institutions supported	Kindergartens	Schools	Students
Dnipropetrovsk	273	65	208	1,043
Zaporizhzhia	117	88	29	21,800
Mykolaiv	272	74	198	74,800
Odesa	273	38	235	89,300
Kherson	7	2	5	1,200
Sumy	231	77	154	72,800
Kharkiv	66	16	50	26,400
Chernihiv	261	97	164	79,200
Total	1,500	457	1,043	445,000

Based on preliminary feedback from local authorities, funding is primarily being used to replace windows and doors to improve thermal insulation, procure back-up energy options and upgrade heating systems upgrades. For example, Sribnianska municipality in Chernihiv received grants for one kindergarten and three schools. New windows and doors have been installed in the kindergarten and two schools, significantly reducing heat loss and improving indoor learning conditions. One school has procured a new boiler, and will replace outdated radiators with modern, energyefficient units. This support will benefit 740 students in this rural area.

5. District heating and energy resilience

District heating and related energy resilience work remained one of the largest components of the response. UNICEF's support combined medium-term rehabilitation with emergency equipment and generator deployment, allowing utilities to continue functioning through blackouts while also improving the reliability of heating networks. By end-March, 37 projects had been completed, benefiting **1.5 million people including 255,000 children**. Support included boiler houses, pumping equipment, valves, pre-insulated pipes, water-treatment units, control cabinets, tools for emergency repair teams, and high-capacity generators to keep heating and water systems operating during outages.

Table 4: District heating support by region

	Locations	Beneficiaries	Support provided
Chernihiv	Chernihiv city, Pryluky	113,400	Electricity distribution systems, pumps with frequency converters, mobile inspection and technological equipment, as well as steel pipes, fittings and flanges
Sumy	Sumy, Konotop, Shostka	111,100	Tools and equipment for emergency repairs; 4MW boiler house; frequency converters and valves
Kharkiv	Kharkiv city, Zmiiv	808,000	Tools and equipment for emergency repairs; 600kW boiler house
Donetsk	Kramatorsk, Sloviansk, Druzhkivka	125,000	Electric tools for maintenance and overhaul works; pipes; energy back-up systems, reagents for water treatment
Dnipropetrovsk	Dnipro city, Pavlograd, Kryvyi Rih, Zhovti Vody	216,000	Heating, hydraulic and electrical equipment, pumps, frequency converters, leak detectors, tools, uniforms and equipment for emergency repairs
Dnipropetrovsk	Zaporizhzhia city	100,000	Current transformers and frequency converters
Mykolaiv	Mykolaiv city, Voznesensk, Horokivske	6,000	Repair of the heat supply system in Mykolaiv Regional Academic Lyceum, construction of a block-modular cogeneration plant
Kherson	Kherson city	30,000	Emergency repair of main heating pipeline, boiler rehabilitation and provision of valves

At the height of the energy crisis in January 2026, UNICEF worked with its existing long-term supplier to procure generators available in-country as well as to expedite the delivery of large-capacity generators to the country. To date, **226 generators ranging from 13.8kVA to 1,105KVA, as well as 1MW gas co-generation unit have been provided to water, sanitation and heating systems as well as health facilities, supporting 1,477,939 people including 244,000 children**. The first round of third-party monitoring in mid-February indicated that 82 per cent of generators were in active use; 13 per cent not yet commissioned (mainly due to pending installation works or missing components), and 5 per cent installed but idle due to stable electricity supply. Eighty-one per cent of institutions reported their needs were fully covered during outages, and in the first three weeks of the response, the generators had been used for an average of 110 hours each. The second round of third party monitoring is currently on-going.

6. Health facility resilience

Support to health facility resilience was added to the winter response as the scale of energy attacks revealed the extent to which blackouts were disrupting life-saving care for children, pregnant women and families. UNICEF introduced the installation of alternative energy systems to its winter response, with a focus on solar power systems.

By the end of the reporting period, **72 health facilities are at various stages of solarization**, including four facilities in frontline Chernihiv where battery and inverter systems have already been installed and are providing daily support during blackouts. Additionally, as an interim urgent power solution, 9 health facilities received a total of 12 diesel-powered generators. Together, the battery/inverter systems and generators supported at least **694,140 people**, including 118,000 children in Odesa, Kharkiv and Sumy.

7. Funding requirements

UNICEF appreciates the contributions made by the European Union, the Governments of Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the family of UNICEF National Committees, to help ensure the health, safety and well-being of children and families in Ukraine over the harsh winter months in 2025-2026.

Activity	Updated requirement (US\$)	Funds received (US\$) ¹
Support to frontline households and vulnerable children	55,500,000	43,942,513
Cash grants to schools	17,500,000	20,087,750
Strengthening district heating systems	21,500,000	36,158,406
Improving health facility resilience	5,500,000	4,589,441
Total	100,000,000	104,778,110

8. Communication and Advocacy

Ahead of the winter season, UNICEF's communication and advocacy plan focused on three objectives: raising awareness about the impact of winter on children and families in Ukraine; showcasing progress and results of the activities under the 2025-2026 winter response plan; and providing visibility and recognition to key partners.

The narrative highlighted the everyday reality for children and families, and the joint efforts of UNICEF and partners to meet urgent needs and reduce disruptions to essential and life-saving services, including the work done over previous years that helped to ensure critical infrastructure and services were more shock-resilient.

By the start of 2026, it was clear that this was the toughest winter of the full-scale war for children and their families. Attacks continued to impact energy, heating, and water systems amid extreme sub-zero temperatures, creating dangerous conditions at home for many families. As the response and appeal expanded, UNICEF also scaled up its communication and advocacy to increase coverage of the acute situation. This included the production of eight human-interest stories published on UNICEF Ukraine's website and social media, along with regular response updates. Strong media engagement, which included four press releases and a media briefing at the Palais in Geneva, resulted in 11 interviews or mentions in international media, including global newswires and UN News. Social media collaborations with government partners and funding partners such as Germany and the UK further extended reach and visibility. More than seven million people were reached on social media in January and February alone.

Communication highlights:

- Press release: [Fourth winter under fire increases risks for children's lives in Ukraine](#)
- Video: [Winter, a child's reality in Kyiv](#)
- Story: [Surviving winter underground](#)
- Story: [Families in Kyiv enduring ice, darkness and uncertainty](#)
- Palais briefing remarks: [Under fire and freezing, children in Ukraine endure the harshest winter of war](#)

¹While the winter plan was fully funded, the timing and nature of contributions meant that a portion of the funding supported preparedness activities for the forthcoming winter season.

9. Lessons learned

What worked well

- **Delivery through government systems:** Experience demonstrated the growing relevance of social protection systems as a complementary delivery channel for predictable shocks, particularly where systems and payment mechanisms are functional. While humanitarian delivery remains essential to ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups beyond the reach of state systems, stronger alignment and complementarity between humanitarian cash responses and government led social protection mechanisms emerged as a key pathway to enhance coherence, efficiency and coverage going forward.
- **Standing partnerships enabled early action.** UNICEF was the first major agency to disburse cash and the second-largest cash partner overall, accounting for 33 per cent of the humanitarian winter cash response. Almost 75 per cent of winter cash payments were disbursed in September and October, allowing families to prepare ahead of the cold season. This was possible because of investments in implementing partners and beneficiary databases built up over the previous two winters. Similarly, when the consequences of damage of heating and energy networks compounded in January 2026, UNICEF worked quickly with its national partner SESU and NGO implementing partners to quickly support the most affected neighbourhoods with child-friendly Invincibility Points and vulnerable families through case management.
- **Early commitments meant communities were ready before winter arrived.** District heating project timelines range from 9 to 12 months. Funds committed – and in some cases received – in the first quarter of the year allowed UNICEF and heating utilities to undertake repairs over the summer months. These communities entered the winter period more resilient to the harsh weather.
- **Repair equipment over capital procurement for district heating.** A deliberate shift away from large single pieces of equipment towards prepositioning of repair materials, pipes, fittings, valves and tools delivered faster results in Kharkiv, Sumy, Kramatorsk and Kryvyi Rih, among others.
- **Capitalizing on long-term agreements.** Holding contingency generators as well as stand-by agreements allowed UNICEF to rapidly mobilize energy back-up needs for water, sanitation and heating networks, as well as to provide fuel directly to critical water utilities.

What changes should be made for winter 2026-2027

- **Preparedness must be year-round and well resourced.** For 2026/27, UNICEF will raise its minimum contingency stock level for energy back-ups and diversify across modalities – including generators, solar systems and solid fuel – to reflect the wider range of infrastructure now being targeted.
- **Earlier, more predictable funding unlocks faster impact.** Several work-streams – most notably the school energy-resilience grants – could not advance through legal and contracting steps with the Government of Ukraine until final confirmation of resources availability. Early confirmation of financial commitments would allow UNICEF to begin the legal and procurement steps in time for funds to reach schools, utilities and health facilities before the cold season starts.
- **Structural cost pressures must be reflected in planning.** Diesel costs in Ukraine rose by approximately 25 per cent in March 2026 alone, driven by disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, and construction costs are over 37 per cent higher than in 2023. Project budgets and bills of quantities for 2026/27 are being verified against current market prices, with particular scrutiny of fuel- and labour-sensitive line items.
- **Reaching the right families requires the right partners.** Where local authorities, social services and trusted national partners were already engaged – particularly in Kyiv, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv regions – UNICEF was able to identify and reach the most vulnerable children rapidly, including those in alternative care, children with disabilities, families in active social-service caseloads and children in detention. Investing in these relationships before the next emergency is one of the highest-return preparedness measures available.



18 January 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine. Four-year-old Mila plays with modelling clay



8 January 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine. Three-year-old Dasha sleeps in her mother's arms

10. Conclusion and way forward

The 2025-2026 winter response demonstrated that protecting children in Ukraine requires both household-level support and sustained investment in essential services. UNICEF's response helped vulnerable families meet immediate heating and energy costs, while also keeping schools, health facilities, water systems, district heating networks and social services functioning through repeated attacks and prolonged outages.

Looking ahead, the experience of this winter reinforces the need to begin preparations early, maintain strong government partnerships, and continue combining emergency delivery with resilience-building investments so that children are better protected in the next cold season. UNICEF is working with its government and inter-agency partners to define plans for 2026-2027 including:

- Delivery of winter cash assistance through Government of Ukraine systems, anchored in technical engagement with national counterparts and supported by capacity building of local authorities.
- Diversified, well-resourced preparedness across all energy modalities (solid fuel, solar energy, generators, co-generation units, etc), with significantly higher contingency stock levels and earlier prepositioning.
- Defining household-levels needs and how to meet them through diverse response modalities in support of government social protection systems
- Improving the resilience and independence of child-focused institutions including health facilities, collective centres and education facilities.



09 January 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine. A UNICEF vehicle is parked at a logistics site in Kyiv, as trucks transport generators and other critical equipment amid freezing winter conditions.