

“Russia can’t break us with darkness”: How Ukrainians endure another winter of attacks

Last week, Russia launched one of the largest attacks against Ukraine’s energy grid since the start of the full-scale invasion, striking power facilities across multiple regions.

Hundreds of drones and missiles forced nationwide power restrictions and killed seven people, including a seven-year-old girl, on the eve of the fourth winter of war.

The barrage, which struck power facilities in Kyiv as well as in other cities such as Zaporizhzhia and Vinnytsia, follows a familiar strategy: using energy as a weapon.

Since 2022, Moscow has repeatedly targeted power plants during the cold months, aiming to break civilian morale by plunging cities into darkness.

“Destroying energy production and distribution capacity as winter starts clearly impacts the civilian population and is a form of terror,” said Matthias Schmale, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, speaking to UN News reporters in Geneva.

In Oleksandriia, a city in central Ukraine, 22-year-old machine learning engineer Vladyslav said his life has become much darker – literally.

“We take it as another challenge. Russia can’t break us with darkness; we don’t fear it anymore,” he said.

His father built a backup power system using a car battery and an inverter to recharge the family’s EcoFlow power station – a portable battery that helps them cook, boil water and keep the lights on during blackouts.

“It allows us to stay connected to the internet and gives me the ability to work on my laptop,” Vladyslav added.

In Kyiv, Anastasiia said the cold is getting worse this year. Before the heating system started working again, she added, “Everyone was freezing in their apartments wearing winter jackets and getting sick because of so many hours in cold.”

She had planned to celebrate her 22nd birthday last weekend – cook food and invite friends – but the blackout schedule she sent showed her district would be without power for hours. “So, it was impossible to cook something,” she said, “possible only if you have gas stove.”

Asked about international support, Anastasia said that while individual messages of concern still reach her, the wider public seems far less engaged.

“How many times I heard a question ‘Is war in Ukraine still going?’ she said. “War is the worst that can happen to you, and it will not stop until whole world will care enough to stop it.”