A HEAVY TOLL

Save the Children

The impact of one year of war on children in Ukraine. February 2023

Acknowledgments

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Names in this report have been changed to protect the identities of those featured in the stories.

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Cover photo: A toy sits on a destroyed swing in a heavily damaged residential area on the outskirts of Kharkiv, Ukraine. Photo taken on July 17, 2022 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children.

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Students use a phone flashlight to study a map while they take shelter in a school basement in Chernihiv region, Ukraine. Photo taken on January 24, 2023 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

1. A YEAR IN MY LIFE

For our village in eastern Ukraine, the beginning was on February 17, 2022.

I was having physics classes online when we first heard explosions ten kilometres away. They then began to land on nearby streets. Our teacher instructed us to rush to the shelter. When I got to the corridor, I heard a loud explosion. I only managed to sit next to the wall, close my ears, and open my mouth to avoid being shocked by the blast wave. We then dashed to the basement, closing the door only to have fragments fly across the basement, the roof, and the asphalt. I sobbed. It was a typical morning, and here we are.

The shelling continued in the days that followed.

On February 21, I awoke to the most powerful explosion. Just a big bang. The birds flew, and then there was silence. It felt like the end of the world. We didn't have time to go to the basement, so my grandmother and I hid behind two walls.

Later that day, we had a session with a psychologist at the village club when we heard a loud explosion. I realized it was somewhere around my house. I remember everything in bits and pieces: how I got to my yard, how there were no windows in the summer kitchen, how a window in the house completely fell out with all the panes, how I entered my room and saw a small shrapnel piece that had pierced the window and was hanging on curtains.

We then went to hide in the basement of an apartment building. Beds, a stove, and a table had been arranged there since 2014 when hostilities first started in our region. I was in the 2nd grade then. I remember how it was in our village, with tanks firing from our streets. I recall how happy we were as children sitting in the same basement when a lady brought us cooked corn. It was like a game where tanks appeared to be cool. We became accustomed to something flying over us. There was nothing we could do.

But this time I got stronger. I contacted volunteers, and we agreed that they would take me and eight other children out with the parents' permission. On February 23, we walked around Kharkiv like the happiest children, and we even went to the zoo. However, we heard explosions late at night. "C'mon, it's Kharkiv, there can't be any explosions," I reasoned at first. But then we realized there was shelling going on.

HEAVY TOLL: THE IMPACT OF ONE YEAR OF WAR ON CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

Sophia*,16, does her make up in the room she shares with her grandmother in western Ukraine. Sophia enjoys doing make- up as it helps her to calm down. Photo taken on January 16, 2023 by Olena Dudchenko / Save the Children

From Kharkiv, we drove for nearly five days to western Ukraine to settle in a hostel. I thought I was leaving home for two weeks. I expected everything to be over in a month.

When we arrived here in March, I started to help at a humanitarian aid point by registering people. Shampoo, shower gel, and other necessities were requested. One woman in summer flip-flops was relieved to receive shoes. I realized that people had nothing. I realized I had left on time.

I begged my grandmother, who was staying at home, to leave because I was alone and worried that I wouldn't be able to handle everything mentally. She has been my main caregiver since I was five. Grandma arrived to me in western Ukraine on April 4. In mid-May, we discovered that only two walls of our house remained. And by now, there is nothing but stones. I spent my entire 16-year life there, and it was all destroyed in a matter of months.

At the end of May, we were told that my father was gone. We didn't sleep for two days because we were crying. Then, on June 2, my father called to tell that he was fine, although injured and getting treatment in the hospital.

The region where I live now is rather safe. I was able to spend the entire summer hanging out with my new friends. I moved with my grandmother from the hostel to a house in July where we now live for free. In the autumn, I began my senior year of high school and will be taking exams to study journalism at a university. I want to get a good education.

However, I am still affected by the war. I haven't heard anything from my mom in eight months. It would be a huge relief to learn that she is alive and well.

There are also power outages, making communication difficult. One morning I saw some sad news reports from the city where my father now lives. I wanted to check on him, but there was no signal and no power. Situations like this make me sick.

There is also a sense of nostalgia. What if I didn't sit here right now and instead went for a walk in the park back home? Or else I'd be sitting in my room? We completed its renovation just before the war.

Now I live by the rule "be yourself and do what you like." If you enjoy drawing, do so. And it appears to me that it will be very useful even during this war.

Children who enjoy drawing might become architects who will rebuild everything destroyed by the war.

Sophia*
16 years old

Ruins of a school in Chernihiv, Ukraine. This is one of two completely destroyed schools after missile attacks in the city.
Photo taken on January 25, 2023 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The dramatic escalation of war in Ukraine in February 2022 has affected every person in the country.

In the year since February 2022, at least 18,657 civilian casualties have been verified by the UN: 7,110 killed and 11,547 injured.[1] The true figures are likely significantly higher.

In Ukraine, those who are hit hardest are those who are least responsible — the country's children. More than 4 children a day are killed or injured, and this number is assumed to be a gross underestimate. Reports of sexual violence, killing, torture and other degrading treatment of children continue to emerge, with very little regard to International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

At least 17.7 million people, including 4.1 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance —around 45 per cent of the pre-February 24 population in Ukraine, and triggered an unprecedent wave of displacement both inside Ukraine and to other countries in Europe. By January 2023, 6.2 million Ukrainians remain internally displaced, and some 8 million are refugees in neighbouring and other countries.

Mines and unexploded ordnance are also a deadly risk for over 2 million children. Over 250,000 explosive remnants of war have already been removed and destroyed since March 2022, but millions more remain, with explosive ordnance potentially present in all areas affected by the war.[2]

Towards the end of 2022, attacks on energy infrastructure intensified, forcing millions across the country to endure winter while rationing electricity and water. In areas that have recently seen active fighting, reports emerged of families melting snow and collecting water from puddles, or queuing for hours to receive basics like bread and drinking water just to survive.

The fighting has forced school closures across the country, leaving children with online education as their only option. However, less than 30 per cent of children have access to an individual device in Ukraine. Frequent electricity cuts pose problems for children that do have devices. Many have missed years of education after years of conflict in the east, the COVID-19 lockdown and now active hostilities across the country.

Children have spent more than 900 hours hiding in bunkers across the country, with this number going significantly higher in areas closer to active hostilities.

4 children are killed and injured **each day** in Ukraine on average.

A toy seen in the rubble of a house that burned down near Chernihiv, Ukraine.
Photo taken on November 15, 2022 by Anastasia Vlasova for Save the Children

In total, the UN estimates that more than 3.5 million children in Ukraine live under severe to catastrophic levels of needs across the country. Children in non-government-controlled areas (NGCA), often close to conflict lines and with the least access to help, are amongst the most at risk. And the conditions for those who were vulnerable even prior to the escalation — such as the 100,000 children who were in institutional care — have been exacerbated either by the ongoing fighting or by being deprioritised both in policy and assistance.

A safer future?

One year of war has been a catastrophe for children in Ukraine. Children live with constant fear and with the psychological distress of having witnessed violence, separation from parents, family members and friends, fleeing across borders or seeing their loved ones killed. Too many are going without the assistance they need and all are at grave risk of harm.

With no end to the war in sight, Save the Children is calling for needs of children, and their need to be protected, to be prioritised. For that to happen, the war must be conducted in line with international humanitarian law. The indiscriminate bombardment and targeting of civilian infrastructure – including schools – must come to an end. Those who are responsible for breaching these laws and violating children's rights must be held to account.

Over **2 million children** are in danger of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Key recommendations

- Parties to the conflict need to ensure full, unhindered humanitarian access to families impacted by the war.
- Parties to the conflict must adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including by respecting the principles of proportionality and distinction between civilians and civilian and military objects.
- The international community must take steps to ensure that those responsible for violations of international law and international human rights law are held to account, including through asking for the establishment of the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations committed against children in Ukraine
- Donors should invest in voices of children in all their diversity, in both ongoing humanitarian response, early recovery processes and future development. Ensure that accountability to children, including most vulnerable, remains at the heart of future development financing for Ukraine and prioritise children's rights and the restoration of family ties in third-country diplomacy.
- Humanitarian leadership should prioritise inclusive approaches to response and recovery that ensure that the rights and needs of all community members in all areas are respected, regardless of populations' background, without creating parallel systems.

Anna*, 9

Anna*, 9, lives in a small village near Kyiv with her parents, grandmother, and five siblings. Heavy shelling and escalation of hostilities forced the family to evacuate for few months in spring 2022. When the family returned home in May, they found their house and roof heavily hit by shelling, and the fence partially destroyed. They also discovered many machine gun casings inside the house as well as an unexploded mine in the yard.

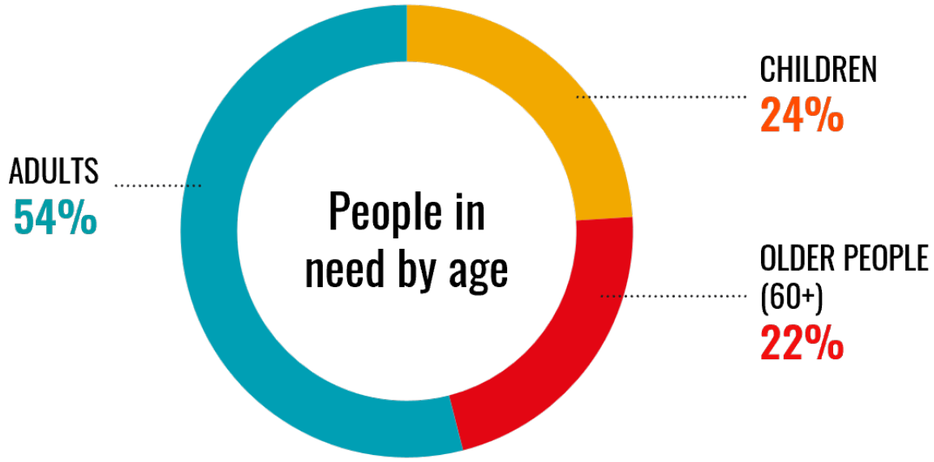
Volunteers assisted the family in dealing with the aftermath of the hostilities and repairing the damage. Save the Children cash assistance enabled the family to resume Anna's* younger brother treatment that was delayed because of war. While active hostilities in the region have ended, the family's life is far from being back to normal. Because their school was damaged, the older children are studying remotely. Frequent power outages and air siren alerts also impede their studies. The children are still scared; the younger ones start crying when they hear loud sounds.

Anna's grandmother embracing her as they pose for the camera near their house in Kyiv region.
Photo taken on by October 28, 2022, by Olena Dudchenko / Save the Children

3. BACKGROUND

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation (RF) launched a full-scale military offensive in Ukraine, dramatically escalating the conflict that had been ongoing since 2014. Fighting has been conducted on land, in the air and sea across the entire country. The capital Kyiv saw intense fighting in the early stages, and other major cities have been devastated by the war, particularly those in the east and south of the country. Since February 2022, the land area exposed to war in Ukraine has exceeded 160,000 square kilometres (about 25 per cent of the country). Some 82 per cent of all damaged houses across Ukraine are in the Donetska, Luhanska, Kharkivska, and Kyivska oblasts, as of June 2022.[3]

Diplomacy has been largely fruitless, with successful diplomatic efforts limited to prisoner exchanges or the deal on export of grain from Ukraine's Black Sea ports negotiated by the United Nations and Turkiye. The conflict has had massive economic ramifications, with some estimates that it has led to 500 billion USD in losses. The war has resulted in more than 18,000 verified civilian casualties since February 24, 2022.



Source: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023,
UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2022, December 28)

4. GRAVE VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Conflict takes a disproportionate toll on children, as they experience the impact of war at a critical time in their lives.

War exposes them to direct physical risks, but also shapes both their sense of normality and poses challenges to their development.

All children in Ukraine — at least 7.5 million — continue to be in grave danger of physical harm, severe emotional distress, and displacement.[4] Air attacks shape everyday life across the country, with children and families forced to hide in bunkers, underground metro stations, and any structure that is seen as capable of withstanding an attack. These places often have little to no water, electricity or heating. Families across the country plan their daily activities in relation to the time it would take to access the closest shelter. On average, children have spent more than 900 hours hiding in bunkers across the country, with this number significantly higher in areas closer to active hostilities.[5]

Verified violations against children include killing and maiming, sexual violence, attacks against schools and hospitals, abduction, torture, detention, and denial of humanitarian access, among others to have been committed on the territory of Ukraine. These are the six grave violations against children recognised by the United Nations.

A school in a village near Kharkiv, Ukraine that was reduced to rubbleby shelling.
Photo taken on September 12, 2022 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

Age of victims of documented sexual and gender-based violence crimes against civilians is ranging from 4 to 82 years old.

Most civilian casualties recorded were caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple rocket launch systems, missiles and air strikes. Of the hundreds of civilians who have had accidents involving explosive ordnance, approximately 40 per cent die from their injuries; and 22 per cent of these deaths are of women and children. Verified data shows that average of 4 children are killed and injured each day in Ukraine – mostly in attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas.[6] The actual numbers are feared to be higher, as verification of cases continue.

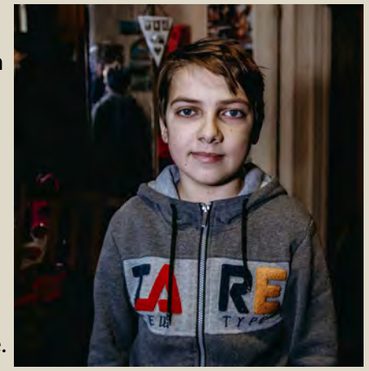
22% of deaths involving explosive ordnance are of women and children.

With a quarter of the territory of Ukraine exposed to hostilities, more than 2 million children in Ukraine are now affected by contamination of landmines and explosive remnants of war and need explosive ordnance risk education and victim assistance.[7] Explosive ordnance is a risk to residents and IDPs, as well as to humanitarian organisations and volunteers, which may be undertaking assessments or providing humanitarian assistance in areas with contamination.

There have been 703 verified attacks on health care providers or institutions, leading to significant reductions in capacity for health care in the country. The conflict has created a significant and growing burden on Ukraine's maternal and new-born health services; reports of premature births estimate that up to 10 per cent of all new-borns are born prematurely in Ukraine. The conflict is exacerbating the situation and poses significant risk to neonatal survival.

As of October 31, 2022, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has documented 86 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against women, men, and girls, including rape, gang rape, forced nudity and forced public stripping, sexual torture and sexual abuse.[8]

Kostia*, 14



Kostia*, 14, lives in a village on the outskirts of Chernihiv with his parents and three siblings (10, 3, and 1 year old). When the fighting began, the family left their home to stay with their grandparents. While the family was away, a shell had landed in their neighbor's yard and the shrapnel damaged their house. With Save the Children support, the family repaired the house which was crucial ahead of winter.

In Kostia's* village power outages are common and often unpredictable, lasting up to 8 hours. When he gets home from school, he does his homework while its still light outside. Then the boy studies under a flashlight until the light comes back on. Kostia* says he can still learn, but not very enjoyable anymore when he studies alone in his home.

Portrait of Kostia*, 14, at his home which was damaged by shelling, Chernihiv, Ukraine.
Photo taken on November 22, 2022 by Olena Dudchenko / Save the Children

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has also documented sexual and gender-based violence crimes against civilians, with victims ranging from 4 to 82 years old. The Commission has documented cases in which children have been raped, tortured, unlawfully confined, killed and injured in indiscriminate attacks with explosive weapons.[9] This exposure to repeated explosions, crimes, forced displacement and separation from family members deeply affects children's well-being and mental health. Some 75 per cent of parents reported their children had symptoms of psychological trauma, and 1 in 6 (16 per cent) of them declared impaired memory, shorter attention span, and decreased ability to learn.[10]

Anastasia*, 3, looks out of the room at her family home in northern Ukraine, near the border with the Russian Federation and Belarus. Photo taken on November 18, 2022 by Anastasia Vlasova for Save the Children

5. EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK

In the past year, education has come under sustained attack in Ukraine. As of December 23, 2022 at least 2,619 educational institutions have been damaged and more than 406[11] have been entirely destroyed in the last year, according to the Ukraine Ministry of Education and Science (MOES).[12]

This equates to more than 20 per cent of educational institutions in the country. This not only directly threatens a generation of Ukrainian girls and boys physically and emotionally and their continued learning in the future, but also threatens worsening their life outcomes.[13]

Attacks on energy and other civilian infrastructure cause lack of electricity and telecommunications technology, preventing children from participating in both remote and blended learning. This leads to severe consequences for a significant proportion of more than six million children in Ukraine. In addition to damage and destruction, educational facilities are being used for military and other purposes, including as collective centres, distribution centres, or for food preparation, further impacting children's access to education.

Since September 2022, online education has been the only option for millions of children across Ukraine. However, online education is dependent on access to devices, power and internet, and less than 30 per cent of children have access to an individual device in Ukraine. This problem is compounded by a 30 per cent increase in the price of laptops and other devices since the escalation of the war in February 2022. Access to satellite internet remains severely limited. Additionally, taking into account the looting and destruction of school IT labs, the government estimates a national requirement of 175,734 laptops and 202,562 tablets for both teachers and students to continue the online education process.[14]

With the ongoing attacks, particularly on critical infrastructure, the number of children for whom distance learning is the only option has increased, from 1.9 million children on 23 September 22 to 2.6 million on 22 October 2022 making around 65 per cent increase.[15] In order to determine the impact of attacks on energy infrastructure on children's learning, Save the Children conducted a survey with some 1,600 parents following the wave of strikes on emergency infrastructure in October 2022, and found that 50 per cent of children had missed online classes in

1 out of 5 schools in Ukraine is damaged or entirely destroyed.

the past week, or could not do their homework as a result of power cuts, lack of internet, and the need to hide in shelters.

While online education is essential to keeping learning alive for girls and boys in Ukraine, it does not replace the in-person support of teachers and a safe physical learning environment where children can learn, play, socialise with their peers, and access a range of support from trusted adults.

The youngest children in Ukraine have never set foot in a kindergarten or first grade of primary school. Children without internet access are calling friends who are attending online classes so that they can share information on the topics covered that day, or going to neighbour's homes to share one device to access online education.[16]

The results of these challenges are that while pre-war Ukraine education system outpaced its regional neighbours in eastern Europe in terms of students' learning resilience, estimates of learning losses due to the ongoing war suggest that learning outcomes are now below the lowest-performing countries in Europe.[17]

The number of children and teachers across Ukraine that require substantial humanitarian education assistance has increased to 5.3 million in 2023 with needs in mental health and psychosocial support, social emotional learning, provision of catch-up/accelerated learning opportunities, and provision of explosive ordnance risk education.

Less than **30%** of children have access to an **individual device** in Ukraine.

Board games and pencils lay on desks at an underground shelter where students of Sedniv lyceum in Chernihiv region, Ukraine hide during air raids. Photo taken on January 25, 2023 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

6. THE IMPACT OF WAR ON ALREADY VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Prior to the crisis, there were an estimated 100,000 children in 663 institutions with an estimated 50 per cent having disabilities, and 70 per cent of children having family members.

Of this total, approximately 30,000 resided in educational residential care facilities (under the care of MOES). These care facilities often resemble institutional care, with children being separated from their family and caregivers for lengthy durations and isolated.

Children living in institutions face unique challenges and concerns relating to family separation, care standards, re-institutionalisation, and lack of individual needs assessments, often continuing after they leave. Even prior to the current crisis, the social workforce saw a substantial reduction as a result of budget cuts and decentralisation of social services.

The challenges these children already faced have been dramatically exacerbated by the conflict. The majority of these children were rapidly sent home without individual best interest assessments or follow up conducted. Many of the predominantly female work force and social workers have been displaced or relocated across borders.

> *"The worst thing is when our children have a fever. When the temperature is high, you see a frail child in bed. There are such children who cannot explain what hurts them, what they feel, and it is heartbreaking. You want to help, but you don't know how."*

> *"When we come in, they say "Mom": they want a mother's love, warmth. And if they see that you took someone by the hand, they all want you to hold their hand. A touch, a smile, and support are important for them now."*

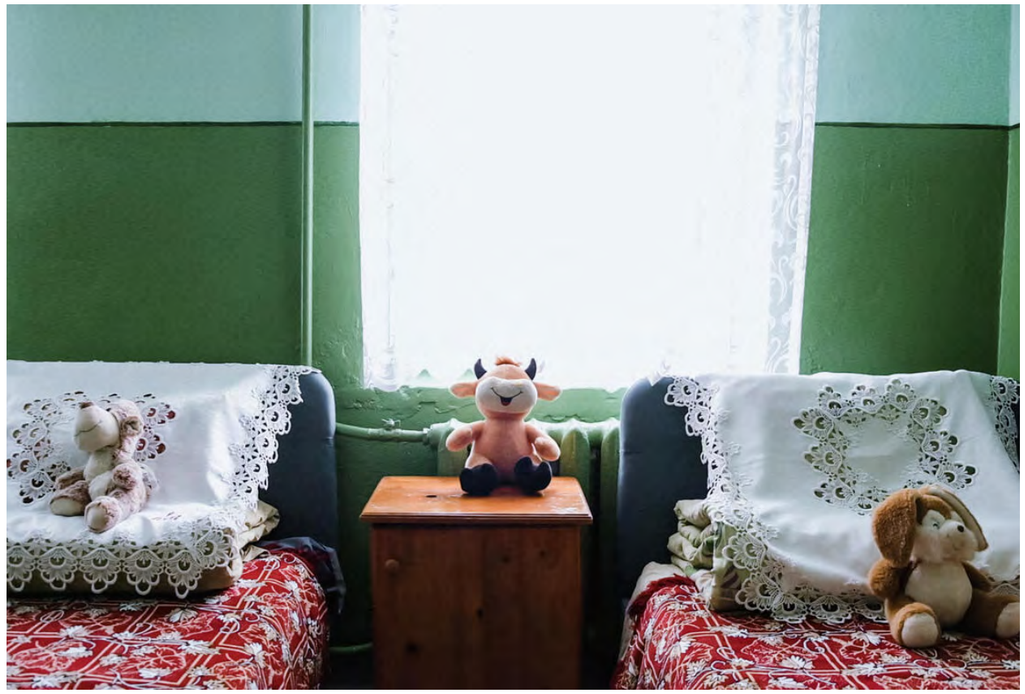
Says Olha, the director of an institution interviewed by Save the Children January 19, 2023.

Where social workers have remained, they are reportedly being pulled into various humanitarian efforts, leading to a reduction in the social workforce in institutions.

The Ministry of Social Policy (MOSP) has conducted a mapping of the majority of the institutions to determine basic information such as the number of children, carers, and where they have been relocated to. However, there are several institutions in areas of active conflict that remain uncontactable or who aren't willing to cooperate with the MOSP.[18]

More broadly, the conflict has also led to the deprioritisation of prior efforts to deinstitutionalise children. As part of the conditions outlined in the European Commission's opinion on its EU membership application, Ukraine will move to a system of family-based care. There is therefore a renewed push and commitment to funding to prioritise deinstitutionalization (DI) in Ukraine.[19]

In April 2022, UNICEF and the MOSP launched a ChatBot[20] that received 13,000 applicants for foster parents inside Ukraine within a matter of weeks. Additional efforts are needed to vet, prepare and support these foster carers to provide support to children who are currently residing in institutional care.



This orphanage in Chernivtsi region, Ukraine is a home for 53 children with disabilities. Around 80% of them are IDPs from the east. Photo taken on January 19, 2023 by Olena Dudchenko / Save the Children

7. CHILDREN FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES

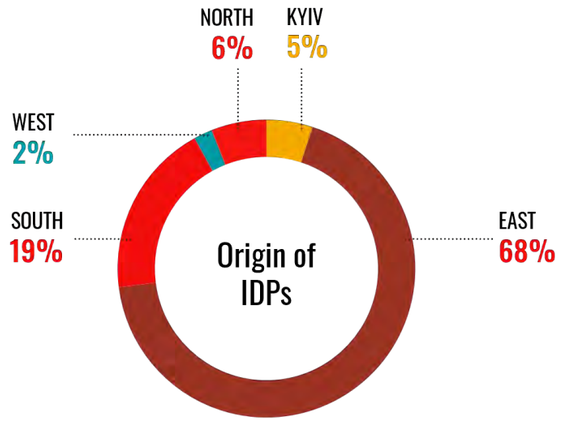
The war in Ukraine has triggered an unprecedented displacement of civilians across the country and outside, forcing more than 6.5 million people to become internally displaced within the first few weeks of the escalation, reaching around 8 million in less than three months.

By January 2023, the number of internally displaced decreased with some people returning home across the country, and some 6.3 million internally-displaced people (IDPs) remained across the country.

Most of the displaced people, both inside and outside the country, are women and children (Only 10 per cent of refugees from Ukraine are male over the age of 18).[21, 22] More than 8 million refugees from Ukraine have been registered across Europe with the majority fleeing to the EU through EU Member States Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia and 3 million recorded in the Russian Federation.[23]

The east of Ukraine is the most affected by internal displacement: most IDPs (over 4 million or 68 per cent) originated in the East, and most IDPs (1.9 million or 32 per cent) are also hosted in the East.

Internally displaced children, in addition to facing ongoing threats related to the conflict in the country, experience similar issues to individuals who are displaced abroad in that they are in a new and unfamiliar location and have been forced to leave their homes and lose their livelihoods.[24]



Source: Ukraine Internal Displacement Report: General Population Survey - Round 11 (25 November - 5 December 2022). International Organization for Migration.

Many children and their families have been displaced multiple times. According to a comprehensive UN survey the reasons for these secondary displacements include adults facing difficulties earning a living (47 per cent), or finding suitable housing (41 per cent). inability to access services (32 per cent), and deterioration of the security situation (28 per cent).[25]

Of those displaced, more than 500,000 are in collective centres or other temporary structures in undignified living conditions. As of September 2022, there were more than 7,200 such centres in Ukraine, an increase from 160 prior to the escalation.[26] The use of schools and other education facilities as collective centres has negatively impacted access to education.

Some 61 per cent of residents of collective sites are female, and 33 per cent of households are female-headed. Children and youth constitute 25 per cent of the residents — with 7 per cent of children below five years of age. Many collective centres lack Child Friendly Spaces and infrastructure for small children, which is needed to provide a safe environment for them.

This increase has placed significant strain on local budgets, particularly as limited or no additional funds were allocated for the purpose of hosting IDPs. Most collective site managers do not have experience in dealing with diverse groups of IDPs, such as ethnic minorities, people with specific needs, female-headed households with children, older people, etc., which can exacerbate IDP vulnerabilities and introduce barriers to accessing services.

22% of deaths involving explosive ordnance are of **women and children.**

ECONOMIC LOSSES

The cost of the war to Ukraine is calculated at average of $500 billion, accounting for economic and military losses.[31] About 53 per cent of Ukraine's GDP was formerly produced in the regions that have been most significantly impacted by the war, including the country's capital, Kyiv. More than half of Ukraine's export capabilities were erased after the attacks on Black Sea ports and sea blockades.[32] The direct and indirect effects of the war can result in the greatest economic recession in Ukraine`s history.

An estimated 30 percent of pre-February 2022 employment (equal to 4.8 million jobs) has been lost, while many of those employed are earning significantly less than they did a year ago. The risks and vulnerabilities to GBV are sharply increasing with 50 per cent of population (half of them women) expressing readiness to accept risky job offers which could lead to exploitation, trafficking and violence.

The deteriorating financial conditions, rising inflation and soaring food prices are causing significant concern for the purchasing power of millions of families in Ukraine, those with children, those living in rural areas and persons with disabilities.

8. CHILDREN IN NON-GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED AREAS

Children in eastern Ukraine have experienced war since 2014. The escalation of the conflict clearly exacerbated some of their pre-existing vulnerabilities, with people living in areas directly impacted by military operations being the most affected. Even the ability to leave conflict-affected areas to safety is limited.

Humanitarian access continues to be severely limited in Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) in Ukraine, which limits the ability to conduct assessments and address needs of children. Administrative and bureaucratic obstacles, strict controls by de-facto authorities, insecurity and lack of guarantees of protection for humanitarian workers all contribute to this lack of access. Analysis of areas that have recently shifted control, however, give an indication of the alarming conditions for children across NGCA.

For example, in Izium, which the Government of Ukraine retook, more than 1,000 civilians are estimated to have died, and 80 per cent of the city`s infrastructure has been destroyed.

In Kharkiv oblast, water, electricity and other basic services were interrupted with reports of mines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXOs) across many civilian areas, impeding delivery of humanitarian assistance and putting children at great risk of physical harm.[27]

Access to health services, essential medicines and marketable goods remains limited as a result of insecurity and movement restrictions due to hostilities, martial law and curfews. In many rural settlements, there are no pharmacies and medical centres, and medicine supply chains have reported been severely disrupted.

Assessments which have been conducted show a similarly alarming picture. In NGCA, it was reported that almost 7,000 residential buildings had so far been damaged in addition to 300 educational facilities and hundreds of other civilian objects and infrastructure.[28]

Almost **7,000** residential buildings had been **damaged** in NGCA.

According to the UN, educational opportunities in NGCA are limited, as many schools are damaged or destroyed, and there is limited internet connectivity to allow for online/ distance learning. Neither the schools nor the children have adequate equipment to facilitate effective online learning. Mental health and psychosocial support for children remains a critical need.[29]

People residing in NGCA continue to also experience serious obstacles to legal protection as they often have no documents, or lack documentation recognised by the Ukrainian authorities (including birth certificates) and/ or must undergo specific court procedures, which are not available in NGCA.

Even when they are, they are complex and time-consuming, including to establish legal proof of life events (including birth and death).[30]

A woman and a girl look at a "car graveyard" near Irpin, Ukraine. The vehicles, some of which might have been used for evacuation, were destroyed in fighting. Photo taken on August 13, 2023 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children.

Children play with Parker, a two-year-old golden retriever therapy dog, during a dog therapy session at a school outside of Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo taken on December 27, 2022 by Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

THERAPY DOG

Khrystyna*, 9, and Victoriya*, 9, live outside of Kyiv, Ukraine with their families. To help process all the changes that have taken place since the start of the war on February 24th, the two girls have benefitted from canine therapy with a two-year-old golden retriever named Parker.

A therapy dog – or any therapy animal – allows children like Khrystyna* and Victoriya* to open up more easily and to ground a child in the present moment, perhaps letting go of negative feelings (e.g. anxiety or fear) in the process.

Nataliya is a canine therapy specialist who works with Khrystyna* and Victoriya*. She uses Parker to focus on human stress – finding stress and reducing stress. She says that Parker can sense a child's stress and then, after Parker reacts, Nataliya can read said reaction to identify what Parker sees in the child.

Afterwards, Nataliya teaches children how to interact with therapy dogs and, through this process, they develop willpower, the ability to take responsibility, endurance, patience, and much more.

Save the Children works with the Ukrainian NGO Your Way to run Child-Friendly Spaces and mobile groups. The mobile groups are part of a project called Your Palms, which offer support to adults and children via specialists including art therapists, psychologists, and canine therapists.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

With no end to the war in Ukraine in sight, Save the Children is calling for a step change for children caught in the midst of the conflict to be better protected. To the extent diplomatic initiatives do exist, these must be channelled towards protecting children.

Too many children are going without the assistance they need, the result of active conflict, politics and lack of prioritisation of meeting children's needs.

More fundamentally, the war must be conducted in line with international humanitarian law, and the indiscriminate bombardment and targeting of civilian infrastructure – including schools – must come to an end. Those who are responsible for breaching these laws and violating children's rights must be held to account.

Parties to the conflict must

- Ensure full, unhindered humanitarian access to families impacted by the war.
- Adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including by respecting the principles of proportionality and distinction between civilians and civilian and military objects. This means in particular:
    - Take all feasible measures to ensure that civilians, in particular children, and civilian objects, especially those impacting children such as homes, schools, and hospitals, are protected from attack.
    - Refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, and take stock of the impact on civilian populations in the planning and conduct of military activities.
    - Cease unlawful attacks on education and ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach in safety. This includes armed forces and armed groups avoiding using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

- Allow — and cooperate with processes — for the documentation and investigation of grave violations against children and other violations of their rights, particularly through a systematic monitoring and reporting of grave violations and holding perpetrators of violations to account.
- Invest additional efforts in ensuring family unity and observing the principle of the Best Interest of the Child in evacuations, and invest in additional steps towards family tracing and reunification, including through continued technical cooperation.
- Ensure access to mental health training and supervision of health workers, teachers, child protection workers, community members and caregivers to deliver psychological first aid, including those working to reunite children who are separated and displaced.
- Systematicly register and follow up on children who are/were in institutions to ensure that their return to families has been accepted, support can be provided, and efforts to prevent re-institutionalisation can be initiated.
- Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration as a mechanism to uphold commitments towards protecting education in armed conflict and support the continuity of safe education.

The international community should

- Strongly condemn attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools and hospitals, and the use of inaccurate explosive weapons and those with a wide impact area which are causing civilian casualties, and violate international humanitarian law.
- Take steps to ensure that those responsible for violations of international law and international human rights law are held to account, including through asking for the establishment of the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations committed against children in Ukraine.
- Encourage that all relevant national and international accountability mechanisms for Ukraine capture the full spectrum of violations and crimes affecting children within their documentation, investigation and prosecution processes; this includes politically and financially supporting gender and child-dedicated expertise to be included in relevant accountability mechanisms.
- Ensure that survivors are represented in discussions about the justice process and that, where safe and appropriate, this includes under 18-year-olds.
- Prioritise children's rights and the restoration of family ties in third-country diplomacy.

- Fund activities that both raise awarness and contribute to clearing mines and UXOs as they pose a risk to residents and displaced populations, as well as to humanitarian organisations and volunteers.

Donor Countries

- Increase immediate, flexible funding to child protection programming, including as a priority strengthening family-based care options, GBV, expanding the social service workforce, and investing in family-focused mental health and psychosocial support
- Invest in voices of children in all their diversity, in both ongoing humanitarian response, early recovery processes and future development. Ensure that accountability to children, including most vulnerable, remains at the heart of future development financing for Ukraine.
- Increase funding and resources available for clearing mines and explosive remnants of war to ensure all children are aware of the dangers of unexploded ordnance by expanding educational and outreach programmes.
- Provide funding for rehabilitation of child victims of explosive weapons, specialist support for survivors of sexual violence and other crimes against children.
- Prioritise funding and solutions that improve the current living conditions and future access to durable solutions and recovery of displaced populations, regardless of where they are in Ukraine or their background.
- Increase financing to education and other services that provide protection and support to children including child protection, mental health and psychosocial support services.

Humanitarian leadership

- Prioritise longer-term, multi-sectoral approaches to supporting integration or reintegration and addressing root causes of vulnerabilities among displaced populations, in addition to continued provision of protection services, combining child protection approaches with interventions that alleviate child poverty, sustained access to formal education and continued participation of children in decision-making processes.
- Prioritise inclusive approaches to response and recovery that ensure that the rights and needs of all community members in all areas are respected, regardless of populations' background.

- Ensure that all humanitarian response plans do not create a parallel system to that, that already exists in the country and that all needs assessments and humanitarian response plans are informed by a rapid intersectional gender and power analysis and the safe and ethical collection and analysis of sex-, age-, and diversity-disaggregated data.
- Develop strategies and approaches that puts the centrality of protection at the heart of the response, prioritising access and response towards the most vulnerable segments of the populations based on need alone, particularly for populations in hard-to-reach areas.

Anna*, 10 years old

When shells were flying over and exploding not far from their home, family of 10-year-old Anna* decided to flee their small village in south Ukraine. Shrapnel struck Anna's* grandfather. And her 90-year-old great grandmother couldn't go to basement to hide, saying "let whatever happens happen".

Anna* now lives in a Zaporizhia dormitory that has been converted into a collective centre for displaced people. Her brother, mother, grandmother, grandfather, great-grandmother, and dog Marsik all live there.

Anna* enjoys it here; she made new friends in the dorm. "The only problem is that they are afraid to knock on my door because of the dog," Anna* explains.

Nonetheless, the girl wishes to return home, although the family doesn't know what is happening there right now. Initially, they received some news from their neighbor who looked after their garden and animals. However, since village's mobile signal vanished, getting news has become even more difficult.

Anna*, 10, posing for the camera with her dog Marsik.
Photo taken on December 21, 2022, by Anastasiia Zahoskina

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A HEAVY TOLL

Save the Children

The impact of one year of war on children in Ukraine. February 2023