

Tragic milestone in Ukraine war as child death toll passes 500

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04 APRIL 2023

The number of children confirmed killed in Ukraine has passed 500 after more than 13 months of full-scale war, Save the Children said today.

Since February 2022, at least one child has been killed every day in Ukraine, according to Save the Children's analysis of verified UN data. As of April 2, at least 501 children have been killed and 991 have been injured in hostilities, most of whom are 12 or older. The actual numbers, though, are feared to be significantly higher.

Sonia Khush, Save the Children's Country Director in Ukraine, said:

"Half a thousand children killed is yet another tragic milestone reached in this war. This is 500 more than it should be. Innocent girls and boys are still being injured and killed every day in Ukraine where violence, including the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, looms on the horizon.

"As a result, there have been three times as many child casualties through the first year of the war compared to the previous eight years of conflict in the east of the country. Children in Ukraine have also experienced immense psychological distress because of violence and instability - many have been separated from their parents, or seen their loved ones killed or injured. The world must act now and do whatever it takes to protect the most vulnerable of human beings."

Explosive weapons with wide area effect are the predominant cause of children's casualties in Ukraine. **In the first year of full-scale war**, 404 children were killed by shelling, missiles and drone strikes, and 850 more were injured. Most casualties occurred in Kharkiv and Donetsk regions where active combat has been continuous since last February.

The grim milestone comes as 1 in 8 civilians killed or injured by landmines and unexploded ordnances is a child, Save the Children said on International Day for Landmine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

According to the UN, since war escalated in February last year, there have been **758 verified** casualties caused by remnants of war in Ukraine – of which nearly 12% are children. Mine accidents are now reported daily, and there have been 126 verified casualties over the last month and a half - or an average of 3 civilians killed or injured by explosive remnants of war per day.

Children in Ukraine are at increasing risk of treading on a landmine or picking up part of a munition, and therefore sustaining life-changing injuries or death. On March 29, a **16-year-old boy was reportedly among four people killed** as a car rode over a mine on a dirt country road in Kharkiv region.

The same happened to Ihor's family when they were driving to fetch water from a local well. A landmine exploded under one of the wheels. Luckily, the family survived.

"We have already gone [to the well], we have fetched water and then we drove by car and somehow found a mine. It is unclear where it came from. Every time you go out, you watch your steps. No more walking along paths, no more picking berries or mushrooms - you can forget about it for a very long time. All the forests and fields around are completely strewn with [explosives]. Every sort of shell was flying around and falling down. Therefore, we only walk along roads that deminers have already examined more than once," - Ihor's mother

Tamara* said.

To educate children about the risks of explosives, Save the Children distributes educational leaflets about mines and runs awareness sessions in schools across Ukraine.

Olha*, 16, a school student from Kyiv region, said: *“We will live with this problem [mines and unexploded ordnance contamination] for a very long time. And every person who is now living around here should understand that it is very dangerous and know the rules that can save their life.”*

Contaminated land also makes it difficult to move humanitarian supplies across land to families who need it most, and prevents people from fleeing on foot when fighting intensifies. Over **10 million** people in Ukraine need help with mine services such as clearance and victim support, according to the UN’s Mine Action group.

“As spring draws near in Ukraine, it is shocking that children who should be playing and socialising safely outside are exposed to the constant, deadly threat. Whether it is an unexploded munition they might occasionally pick up and play, or a mine exploding beneath them – all of that may cause permanent, life-changing injuries, or death,” said Sonia Khush.

“Landmines do not discriminate between a child or a soldier – their use violates international law, poses a grave risk to children, and additionally hampers the ability to transport humanitarian aid to where it is needed most.”

Save the Children is calling on all sides to adhere to obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, and ensure that civilians and civilian objects, especially those impacting children such as homes, schools, and hospitals, are protected from attack.

Inside Ukraine, Save the Children and local partners are providing shelter, food,

cash, fuel, psychological support, and baby and hygiene kits to displaced families. Save the Children has been operating in Ukraine since 2014, delivering humanitarian aid to children and their families. It is now supporting refugee families across Europe and helping children to access education and other critical services.

ENDS

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**Names have been changed.*

NOTES TO EDITORS:

According to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 758 civilian casualties caused by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) have been recorded as of April 3, 2023. As of February 15, 2023, there have been 632 such casualties verified. $745-632=126/46[\text{number of days in the timespan}]=2.73$ people killed or injured by mines or ERW per day.

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