UKRAINE

Indiscriminate shelling and targeted artillery attacks damaged or destroyed more than 740 schools in Ukraine, and both sides of the conflict used schools and universities as bases and barracks. Artillery fire, other explosions, and—early in the reporting period— air strikes occurred near schools, killing and injuring students and other civilians. Fear of such attacks caused many parents to keep their children out of school. Similar attacks also sporadically targeted higher education infrastructure and personnel.

Context

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovytch's ouster from power in February 2014 prompted violent clashes between pro- and anti-government protestors in southeastern Ukraine. When Russia took control over Crimea in March 2014, armed groups took control of many towns and cities in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of eastern Ukraine, and an armed conflict began between these groups and Ukrainian forces.[2404] In May of the same year, armed groups proclaimed self-rule in a referendum on the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.[2405]

In the Minsk agreements of February 2015, the two sides agreed to a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the "contact line" separating the Government-Controlled Areas (GCA) and the Non-Government-Controlled Areas (NGCA), and access for monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Nevertheless, fighting and shelling continued to flare up.[2406]

Between April 2014 and May 2017, the conflict killed at least 2,505 civilians and injured between 7,000 and 9,000.[2407] Ceasefire violations by all parties to the conflict and almost daily shelling, localized clashes, and unexploded ordnances caused damage and insecurity in civilian areas.[2408]

The conflict led to a splintered education system, and fighting disrupted children's access to education near the contact line.[2409] An assessment published by UNICEF in June 2017 showed that more than 12,000 of the approximately 19,000 children living in GCAs within three miles of the contact line lived in areas that were hit by shelling in the last three months of 2016.[2410] The same UNICEF report found that large numbers of kindergarten-age children living along the contact line were out of school because their parents saw the shelling as too risky and kept them at home.[2411] In addition, five respondents interviewed by UNICEF mentioned gender-based violence and specifically noted that older school girls faced abuse by soldiers, with the proximity and size of military installations being possible risk factors contributing to this violence.[2412] Between 2013 and March 2017, 16 universities and 10 other higher education institutions were forced to relocate to Kyiv, Kryvyi Rih, Kramatorsk, Severodonetsk, Kharkiv, and other cities, due to the violence.[2413]

Ukraine was not included in the 2014 issue of *Education under Attack,* as the conflict had not yet broken out and the country did not meet the reporting criteria.

Attacks on schools

Rockets, heavy artillery, and mortars launched by all parties to the conflict damaged or destroyed hundreds of schools on both sides of the contact line.[2414] In March 2017, the Education Cluster reported that at least 740 schools had been damaged or destroyed since the conflict began in April 2014.[2415] Information collected by GCPEA indicated that attacks on schools were particularly intense in 2014 and 2015, with between 117 and 290 schools damaged or destroyed in 2014 and approximately 200 similarly affected the following year.[2416] As the sustained intensity of the conflict diminished, these numbers decreased slightly, with reported attacks on 26 schools in 2016 and 42 in 2017.[2417]

In 2014, when the armed conflict began, schools in the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces were damaged and destroyed, mainly by indiscriminate shelling but also by direct attacks. In late August 2014, humanitarian organizations and the media estimated that the fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts partially or completely destroyed between 117 and at least 290 schools.[2418] Schools damaged or destroyed in the violence included the following:

· Media sources reported that in September 2014, unknown assailants attacked a school being used as a shelter in Spartak village, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).[2419]

- According to international media, between August 2014 and February 2015, shelling destroyed a school in Nik-ishine village, Donetsk oblast, and damaged the kindergarten.[2420]

- OCHA reported that on October 1, 2014, shells hit a school playground and a minibus in Donetsk city (NGCA), killing 10 adults.[2421] According to media reports, a teacher and a student's father were among the casualties, and at least 50 school children were inside the school during the attack.[2422] International media reported that shrapnel shattered windows on the first and second floors of the school.[2423]

- According to the UN, in late October 2014, shelling damaged at least five kindergartens and seven schools in Makiivka town, Donetsk oblast (NGCA). Thirty other educational institutions also suffered damage that month from shelling in Horlivka town, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).[2424]

During 2015, schools in eastern Ukraine continued to sustain damage as they were caught in the crossfire of fighting. According to OCHA, as of October 2015, nearly 200 schools, or one in every five, was damaged or destroyed in NGCA eastern Ukraine.[2425] Examples of artillery or missiles landing on schools included the following:

- Media sources documented an incident in January 2015 in which projectiles landed in Artema town, Luhansk oblast (GCA), hitting and detonating in one school building. The school was abandoned at the time.[2426]

- In February 2015, according to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, a missile hit school No. 6 in Debalt-sevo town, Donetsk oblast, during fighting for of the city. The missile damaged part of the school's floor struc-ture.[2427]

- Later in 2015, OCHA reported that on November 5, 2014, mortar and artillery shells struck a school sports field in Donetsk city. The strike killed at least two children and injured four more.[2428]

Fighting continued to affect schools in eastern Ukraine during 2016. Shelling and explosions damaged or destroyed at least 26 schools, as reported by the Education Cluster.[2429] For example:

- OHCHR documented damage to three schools during shelling that took place on the night of July 9 through the morning of July 10 in Horlivka town and Sakhanka village, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).[2430]

- The *Interpreter* reported that on October 5, 2016, a vehicle explosion shattered the windows of six local schools and three kindergartens in Makiivka town, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).[2431]

Attacks on schools appeared to escalate in 2017 over the previous year, according to information reported by the Edu-cation Cluster. The Education Cluster documented damage or destruction to 42 schools in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts during 2017, including 28 schools in NGCA and 14 schools in GCA.[2432] At least one school was damaged every month throughout 2017.[2433] These incidents reflected continuing violence throughout the year. For example:

- On April 10, 2017, a bullet hit the window of a kindergarten facility in NGCA Donetsk oblast. At the time, 157 chil-dren were in the school, 30 of them in the playroom where the bullet hit the window.[2434]

- The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) visited several villages between April and July 2017 and found evi-dence of shelling having damaged six schools. Two of these were in Luhansk oblast: one in NGCA Kadiivka city, visited on April 30, and the other in Zolote city (GCA), visited on July 15.[2435] Four of the damaged schools found by the SMM were in Donetsk, where monitoring took place between May 28 and June 18, 2017: two of the schools were in Krasnohorivka (GCA), one was in Pavlopil village (GCA), and one was in Yasynuvata village (NGCA).[2436]

- The OSCE SMM found damage to three schools in Donetsk in October and November. One of the schools was damaged on October 29, 2017, in Oleksandrivka, and two were damaged on November 5, 2017, in Donetsk city. All of these incidents damaged school and dormitory walls and broke windows with gunfire or shelling.[2437]

- The Education Cluster reported that seven kindergartens or schools were damaged in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts between December 13 and December 21, 2017. This included three in NGCA Donetsk, two in GCA Donetsk, and two in NGCA Luhansk.[2438] The windows of most of the schools were broken, and one kindergarten in No-voluhanske, Donetsk oblast (GCA), had been directly hit twice on December 18, substantially damaging its roof.[2439]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Attacks on students and teachers were infrequent. GCPEA found reports of only two targeted attacks on education personnel, both by unknown perpetrators, and no targeted attacks on students during the 2013-2017 period:

- According to OHCHR, on May 14, 2014, four armed men in camouflage abducted the principal of a school in Luhansk from the school premises because she opposed holding a referendum at the school. The men released the principal several hours later. The exact location of the incident was not reported.[2440]

- Local media reported that on February 15, 2016, unidentified assailants threw three grenades at the home of a school director in Stanytsya-Luhanska district, Luhansk oblast (GCA). There were no casualties in the incident.[2441]

Military use of schools and universities

There were reports that parties to the conflict used schools and universities for military purposes, deploying fighters in or near educational facilities, and storing weapons in or near school buildings. In several cases all students were forced to evacuate. Parties to the conflict also reportedly used several state orphanages and boarding schools as bases of operation due to their strategic locations on the outskirts of towns.[2442] There was also anecdotal information that de facto authorities encouraged the use of schools. For example, according to OHCHR, de facto authorities in NGCA Donetsk allegedly pressured school personnel to establish "hideouts" in schools.[2443]

More information was available on the use of schools by Ukrainian armed forces, although it was not clear that these forces used schools more frequently than armed groups. Additionally, most information on military use was reported in 2017. This increase may have been a consequence of strengthened monitoring systems rather than an actual increase in instances of military use.

Parties to the conflict used schools and universities throughout 2014, reportedly establishing bases and other strategic positions in education facilities in at least five cases:

- OHCHR reported that in July 2014, in the village of Golmovsky, Donetsk oblast, an armed group used a school as a base until Ukrainian forces destroyed it.[2444]

- There were multiple media reports that armed fighters used Donetsk National University. On July 7, 2014, armed fighters allegedly entered the dormitories of Donetsk National University in Donetsk city and drove students from their rooms at gunpoint. Media sources reported that the group captured the entire university nine days later and converted dormitories into living quarters for fighters.[2445] Two months later, on September 10, 2014, armed assailants led by a former professor at the university reportedly seized buildings at the institution. The purpose or duration of the seizure was unclear.[2446]

- In August 2014 in Novosvitlivka town, Luhansk oblast (formerly NGCA), Human Rights Watch reported that armed forces used a school as a base during fighting with armed groups. During this fight, most of the school was destroyed by indiscriminately fired Grad rockets, and it remained devastated one year later. The fighting reduced school enrollment by nearly half, as many students attended an overcrowded school nearby.[2447] As of May 2016, local reconstruction efforts had restored much of the Novosvitlivka school, but furniture and school supplies were lacking.[2448]

- In August 2014, also according to Human Rights Watch, staff evacuated all students from an orphanage-school for children with vision impairments in Yenakiieve city, Donetsk oblast (NGCA), when armed forces were deployed there. The forces remained in the building for six months, and fighting in February 2015 severely damaged the school. It was not yet repaired as of September 2015.[2449]

- Armed groups also reportedly used a school as a base in the city of Pervomaisk, Luhansk oblast, during 2014, according to Human Rights Watch.[2450] During the last week of November 2014, Human Rights Watch researchers observed signs on trees next to the school that read, "ENTRY PROHIBITED. SHOOT TO KILL" and "MINES."[2451]

In 2015 there were two reported cases of military use of schools by Ukrainian forces:

- According to Human Rights Watch, in Vuhlehirsk town, Donetsk oblast (NGCA), a principal reported that different armed forces and armed groups occupied school No. 42 at different times during 2015 and used it for weapons

storage.[2452] NGO and media sources reported that artillery hit the school six times in January and February 2015, which damaged parts of its infrastructure.[2453] For example, fighting between January and February 2015 reportedly destroyed part of a third-floor wall when an armed group fired a tank at the school, targeting a Ukrainian sniper positioned near the window.[2454]

· In Marinka city, Donetsk oblast (GCA), Ukrainian forces reportedly used an orphanage-school as a base in November 2015 and the children were evacuated, according to Human Rights Watch.[2455] As of May 2016, Ukrainian forces were still stationed at the orphanage and reportedly had no plans to relocate.[2456]

Throughout 2016 there was evidence that parties to the conflict used schools for military purposes. At least four cases were reported. For example:

· In July 2016, the UN reported that Ukrainian forces were positioned at a school in Pavlopil village, Donetsk oblast (GCA).[2457]

· In August 2016 the OSCE SMM observed a military compound located 120 meters from a school in Komyshuvakha settlement, Zaporizhia oblast.[2458]

· According to OHCHR, in Zaitseve settlement of Horlivka town, Donetsk oblast (GCA), an armed group affiliated with the de facto NGCA authorities was stationed at a local school as of July 2016.[2459]

· In September 2016, according to the OSCE SMM, Ukrainian forces used the roof of a school in Krasnohorivka town, Donetsk oblast (GCA), as an observation post and the school grounds as a shooting range, which damaged the building and school equipment.[2460]

According to the Education Cluster, there were at least seven reports of military use of schools in 2017.[2461] The cases reported by the Education Cluster, OSCE, or UN sources included the following:[2462]

· On April 2, 2017, the OSCE SMM in Ukraine observed at least five soldiers from the Ukrainian armed forces and two vehicles parked inside a former kindergarten in a GCA Zolote city, Luhansk. The commander of the Ukrainian armed forces told the SMM that an agreement had been made with local authorities that allowed the armed forces to use the school buildings.[2463]

· On April 11, OHCHR observed that a former boarding school close to a functioning kindergarten in Novotroiske, Donetsk oblast, was being occupied by Ukrainian armed forces. It was unclear how long they had been using the school.[2464]

· On August 4, 2017, the OSCE SMM in Ukraine found that a school in Popasna city, Luhansk oblast (GCA), was being occupied by Ukrainian armed forces. There were trucks parked on the school grounds and 30 to 35 soldiers in the school, some of whom were armed, and a military crane was being used for construction work in the schoolyard. A sign saying, "No entrance - access forbidden" had been placed outside the school.[2465]

· The OSCE SMM reported information indicating that on September 9, 2017, the SMM in Teple, Luhansk oblast (GCA), had found that Ukrainian armed forces were using part of a building that housed a canteen for the school next door. Students from the school used one door to the building and soldiers used another.[2466]

· On September 13, 2017, the OSCE SMM in Ukraine saw a compound housing Ukrainian armed forces located 30 meters from a school in Muratove, Luhansk oblast (GCA), according to the Education Cluster.[2467]

· The OSCE SMM reported information about another military compound opposite a school in Poltavka, Donetsk oblast (GCA), on September 18, 2017. There were military personnel and vehicles in the compound at the time.[2468]

· The OSCE SMM reported the presence of armed forces at the entrance of a kindergarten in Olkhovatka, Donetsk oblast (NGCA), on November 10, 2017. Local residents reported to the SMM at the time that students from the school had been attending another institution for approximately one year.[2469]

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

Several media reports suggested that armed groups and school personnel in areas controlled by armed groups trained or recruited students at school for military purposes. For example, in November 2014, a *BBC Russia* article reported that armed groups visited several schools in NGCA in order to recruit 14-year-old students to spy on Ukrainian forces.[2470]

According to a UNICEF publication, school directors consistently reported that armed forces visited schools along the contact line and encouraged children to apply for military academies.[2471] These visits reportedly declined in frequency in the last six months of 2016, before which they had occurred approximately every three or four months. The report did not specify which armed forces were responsible for these visits.[2472]

Attacks on higher education

In addition to the case of military use of a university documented above, assailants, who were often unidentified, carried out at least three attacks on higher education during the reporting period. Reported incidents included the following:

· Local media reported that assailants allegedly associated with de facto NGCA authorities kidnapped nine Nigerian students on July 21, 2014, in Luhansk city. The outcome of the incident was not clear as of August 2017.[2473]

· Media sources reported that in Kharkiv city on July 1, 2015, an explosive detonated near the dormitories of Kharkiv Polytechnic University, damaging windows. No one claimed responsibility for the incident.[2474]

· Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and local media reported an incident on January 27, 2016, when de facto NGCA authorities detained professor Igor Kozlovsky for supposedly possessing illegal weapons and supporting Ukraine.[2475] He was detained until May 3, 2017, when the unofficial military court convicted him of weapons possession and sentenced him to two years, eight months in prison, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.[2476]

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