UKRAINE

Almost 100 attacks on schools were reported in Ukraine between 2017 and 2019, less frequently than at the height of the conflict, but affecting the education of hundreds of children. Several cases of military use of schools were reported annually, and more than 150 schools were concerned about the proximity of military activities. School students and staff members were also injured or killed in attacks throughout the reporting period.

Context

Despite repeated ceasefire agreements, fighting continued in eastern Ukraine throughout the reporting period, while the Minsk Agreements, the existing framework for peace, were largely unimplemented. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine regularly identified ceasefire violations along the “contact line”—a 500 kilometer line separating non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts from the rest of Ukraine – government-controlled areas (GCA). After a sharp increase in violence in early 2019, armed clashes appeared to decrease throughout the rest of the year.

The conflict significantly impacted civilian life during the reporting period. At the end of 2019, the UN reported that approximately five million people were affected by the armed conflict, with 3.4 million requiring humanitarian assistance and protection. According to ICG and the UN, over 600,000 people were living in unsafe areas near the contact line and were at daily risk due to shelling, landmines, restrictions of movement and access to basic services. Landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERWs) remained one of the biggest threats to civilian life during the reporting period. According to the UN, Ukraine had the highest number of anti-vehicle mine incidents globally from 2016 to 2018, and mine-related incidents accounted for 40 percent of civilian casualties in 2017 and 2018. Hostilities also caused damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure, including schools, and were a significant barrier to education. Hundreds of schools were damaged or destroyed, schools were closed, and teaching staff were lost, resulting in significant gaps in learning. According to the Education Cluster, in 2018, more than 242,000 children and teachers living near the contact line faced significant security risks on the way to school, including shelling, landmines, and other explosives.

Attacks on education, particularly attacks on schools, continued to occur throughout the reporting period, although not as frequently as during the height of the conflict. Rates of attack on education shifted with the dynamics of fighting, with dozens of attacks taking place in 2017 and 2019, and fewer in 2018. In November 2019, Ukraine became the 100th country to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. International partners in Ukraine also supported the protection of education during this period. For example, in May 2019, the Ukraine Education Cluster published a Guidance Note for monitoring, reporting, and responding to attacks on education, for use by partners in the field.

Attacks on schools

GCPEA collected reports of at least 95 attacks on schools which took place between 2017 and 2019. Mortars, small arms fire, and other explosives damaged schools in dozens of incidents that took place along the contact line between 2017 and 2019. Some schools were struck multiple times. Dozens of schools also reported the presence of unexploded ordnance in their vicinity. Attacks on schools significantly decreased from the period covered in Education under Attack 2018; more than 740 schools were reportedly damaged or destroyed between April 2014 and March 2017.

The Education Cluster reported 43 attacks on schools in 2017, a significant increase over the numbers reported in 2016 (26). However, no structured monitoring and reporting mechanism existed in 2016, so attacks may have been underreported. Rates of attacks on schools fell again in 2018, with the Education Cluster reporting 16 incidents. Over half of these attacks reportedly occurred in May and June of that year. The attacks affected hundreds of children, who were sometimes attending school at the time of the attacks. In addition, in 2018, 61 schools reported the presence of unexploded ordnance in their vicinity. Examples of attacks included:
- Staff at a school located on Lenina Street in Dokuchaievsk, Donetsk oblast (NGCA) informed the OSCE SMM that at noon on February 14, 2018, shelling began. Three hundred students were in the school at the time, and school staff accompanied the students to a shelter in the building. A staff member at another school on the same street also reported explosions around the same time, while students were in class. The OSCE SMM reported seeing damage to windows of both schools and damage to the wall of the second school.2169

- The OSCE SMM reported that the director of a school in Hranitne, Donetsk oblast (GCA), reported to the OSCE SMM that her school was struck by small arms fire on the afternoon of May 13, 2018. No students were in the school at the time. The Monitoring Mission reported damage to a window of the school.2170

- Various actors and media reported that, on May 17, 2018, shells reportedly hit School #11 in Svitlodarsk, Donetsk oblast (GCA). The school reportedly had 387 students and 46 staff members present at the time of the attack. The SMM reported observing a crater next to the school and fresh shrapnel scars on trees next to the crater.2172

- On June 9, 2018, the SMM observed a hole in the roof of a school building and debris on the roof of a nearby kindergarten in Donetsk oblast (NGCA). The SMM reported seeing fighters near the building.2173

- The Education Cluster reported that on August 27, 2018, shooting occurred at a kindergarten in Verhnoretseke, Donetsk oblast (GCA), injuring the mother of a child.2174

- On September 11, 2018, shelling reportedly occurred in the vicinity of a school in Zolote 5/ Mykhailivka, Luhansk oblast (NGCA), while classes were in session. Around 100 students and teachers reportedly had to be evacuated.2175

- On October 18, 2018, a hand grenade reportedly exploded near a kindergarten in Donetsk city without injury.2176

Attacks on schools more than doubled from 2018 to 2019, with the Education Cluster recording 36 incidents resulting in damage to schools in 2019.2177 Almost two-thirds of these incidents took place between January and July.2178 Seven attacks took place in March 2019, despite a recommitment to the ceasefire, which came into effect at the beginning of the month.2179 Much of the fighting affecting education was concentrated in Zolote 5/ Mykhailivka, Luhansk oblast (NGCA). According to the Education Cluster and OSCE, School #4 on the outskirts of Zolote 5/ Mykhailivka, which serves 100 students, was damaged by fighting at least 15 times between January and August 2019, sometimes while classes were in session, so that children needed to be led to shelter in the basement.2180 The school, serving 87 students and 15 pre-school children, also faced temporary closures because of the fighting.2181 Schools reportedly affected by fighting in other areas included:

- On January 22, 2019, a shooting that took place during the night reportedly damaged a kindergarten that was serving 21 children in Chermalyk, Donetsk oblast (GCA), according to the Education Cluster.2182

- On January 24, 2019, shelling temporarily closed the Popasna #5 School in Zolote-4, Luhansk oblast (GCA). According to the Education Cluster, the shelling started while children were at the school, which had 48 students enrolled, but there were no reports of casualties or injuries.2183

- On March 21, 2019, machine gunfire struck and damaged School #116 in Donetsk city during the early morning while children were inside. Classes were suspended, but there were no reports of casualties or anyone injured. The school had reportedly only recently re-opened in February 2019, after being heavily damaged and closed in 2014.2184

- On March 21 and 22, 2019, explosive devices were found near Schools #96 and #92 in Donetsk city. Both devices were defused without detonation.2185

- On March 30, 2019, the OSCE SMM reported observing fresh shrapnel holes in the windows of a functioning school on Lunacharskoho Street in Zolote-2/Karbonit, Luhansk (GCA).2186

- On July 11, 2019, the Education Cluster and the OSCE reported that armed elements fired mortars, small arms, and artillery near Lukove, Donestka (NGCA). The attack damaged a nearby school building, shattering 20 windows, creating several shrapnel holes, and causing more than 15 craters within a 120-meter radius of the building.2187
- On October 15, 2019, the OSCE and the Education Cluster reported that clashes between armed elements caused damages, including broken windows and a hole in the roof, to a functioning school in Oleksandrivka, Donetsk (NGCA). 2188

- On November 4, 2019, the Education Cluster reported that heavy shelling occurred in the area of School #10 in Novotoshkivske, Luhansk (GCA). Children were evacuated to a bomb shelter but no injuries or damages to the school were reported.2189

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

GCPEA collected reports of at least 15 attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel, between 2017 and 2019. By comparison, in Education under Attack 2018, GCPEA reported two attacks on students or educators, which took place in 2014 and 2016.2190

In 2018, the Education Cluster reported five incidents of threatened or actual death or injuries, at least one of which was reported as an individual incident, as described below.2191 Media sources also reported one incident that affected students or school personnel in 2018; it was not clear whether this was included in incidents reported by the Education Cluster. They included:

- The Education Cluster and local media reported that on April 12, 2018, mortars or artillery reportedly struck a school bus with children on board in Zaisevo village, near Gorlovka, Donetsk (NGCA). The children were evacuated, and no one was injured.2192

- On May 22, 2018, the Associated Press and other local sources reported that an explosion occurred on a bus in Debaltseve, Donetsk oblast (NGCA), when a grenade located in the backpack of a schoolboy exploded. One boy died and two boys and a girl were allegedly injured, all of whom were between the ages of 14 and 16.2193

In 2019, the Education Cluster reported ten incidents involving threats of death or injuries towards school students, teachers, or parents.2194

Military use of schools and universities

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports of almost 20 incidents of military use of schools. By comparison, between two and five cases of military use were reported each year from 2014 to 2016, which included the use of school grounds as bases, for weapons storage, and military vehicle parking.2195

The Education Cluster reported eight cases of schools used for military purposes, or located in close proximity to military bases, in 2017,2196 and 11 cases in 2018.2197 In addition, over 150 schools reported being concerned about the proximity of military activities, according to an Education Cluster survey conducted in mid-2018.2198 The OSCE SMM reported 12 cases of observing military use of schools or military bases in the proximity of schools in 2018.2199 It was not clear whether these overlapped with those reported by the Education Cluster:

- On March 24, 2018, the OSCE SMM reported trenches that were newly dug near a school building in Pavlopil near Mariupol, Donetsk oblast (GCA).2200

- On May 22, 2018, the Monitoring Mission observed three surface-to-air missile systems located 50 meters from a school building in Tarasivka, Donetsk oblast (GCA).2201

- On May 31, 2018, a member of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) reportedly informed the OSCE SMM that the UAF’s engineering unit had been temporarily using School #27, located on Tsiolkovskoho Street in Popasna, Luhansk oblast (GCA), for the past ten months, since August 2017. The school's displaced students were relocated to other schools in Popasna.2202

- On June 12, 2018, the OSCE SMM observed infantry combat support vehicles next to a school in Zolote-3, Donetsk oblast (GCA).2203

- On July 1, 2018, the Monitoring Mission observed two stationary armored personnel carriers and approximately 15-20 UAF soldiers on the premises of a former community building located 200 meters from an in-use school in Zolote-4/Rodina, Luhansk oblast (GCA). Four local adult civilians expressed to the SMM that they were concerned about letting their children use the school’s playground.2204
- On July 5, 2018, the OSCE SMM observed a UAF compound located approximately 350 meters from a functioning school in Troitske, Luhansk oblast (GCA), and a UAF position 300 meters from another functioning school in Artema, also in Luhansk oblast (GCA).2205

- On September 16, 2018, the OSCE SMM observed an infantry fighting vehicle in the courtyard of a school that was no longer functioning in Marika, Donetsk (GCA).2206

- On September 18, 2018, the OSCE SMM saw three armored personnel carriers near a non-functional school that was being used by armed parties in Donetskyi, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).2207

- The OSCE SMM observed three combat firing positions on the roof of a building located across the street from a functioning school in Hranitne, Donetsk oblast (GCA) on September 24, 2018. The mission also observed four individuals dressed in camouflage, believed to be UAF soldiers, near the school.2208

- The OSCE SMM observed three surface-to-air missile systems in a schoolyard in Pobieda, Luhansk oblast (GCA) on December 10, 2018. The school was not functioning.2209

- The OSCE SMM observed two vehicles, identified as likely to be an armored personnel carrier and an armored reconnaissance vehicle, next to a school being used by armed parties in Donetskyi, Donetsk oblast (NGCA), on December 31, 2018. The school was not functioning.2210 It was not clear whether this was the same school as in the OSCE SMM’s report from September 18, 2018.

The Education Cluster reported eight incidents of educational facilities being used for military purposes or located close to military activity in 2019.2211 The OSCE SMM observed eight similar cases between January and July 2019. The overlap between these incidents and the Education Cluster’s reports was unclear. The incidents reported by the OSCE SMM were:

- On February 25, 2019, the OSCE SMM observed an armored personnel carrier and an armored reconnaissance vehicle next to a non-functional school being used by the armed parties in Donetskyi, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).2212 This may have been the same school as the one(s) observed by the OSCE SMM on September 18, 2018 and December 31, 2018.

- The OSCE SMM observed two military tents and six UAF soldiers located near a functioning school in Novoluhihanske, Donetsk oblast (GCA), on March 13, 2019.2213

- The OSCE SMM reported an armored personnel carrier located next to a functioning primary school in Raihrodkha, Luhansk oblast (GCA), on April 7, 2019.2214

- On May 19, 2019, the OSCE SMM reported the presence of an armed personnel carrier in the yard of a non-operational school in Kalmiuske, Donetsk oblast (NGCA).2215

- On June 1, 2019, the OSCE SMM observed a surface-to-air missile system near a functioning school in Tarasivka, Donetsk oblast (GCA).2216

- In Popasna, Luhansk oblast (GCA), the OSCE SMM observed a tank stationed within 150 meters of a school on multiple occasions, including July 15, 27 and 31, 2019.2217

- The OSCE SMM reported that, on August 21, 2019, an armored personnel carrier was parked near a school building in Raihorodka, Luhansk oblast (GCA).2218

- On August 24, 2019, the OSCE SMM observed a multiple launch rocket system about 40 meters from civilian homes and about 150 meters from a school in Chabanivka, Luhansk oblast (GCA).2219
discrepancy between this number and those included in Ukraine’s Situation Report on April 18, 2019, which included no information about military use of schools occurring in 2017.


2201 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 23 May 2018,” OSCE, May 24, 2018.

2202 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 31 May 2018,” OSCE, June 1, 2018.

2203 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 12 June 2018,” OSCE, June 13, 2018.

2204 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 1 July 2018,” OSCE, July 2, 2018.

2205 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 6 July 2018,” OSCE, July 7, 2018; “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 5 July 2018,” OSCE, July 6, 2018.

2206 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 18 September 2018,” OSCE, September 19, 2018.

2207 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 19 September 2018,” OSCE, September 20, 2018.

2208 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 25 September 2018,” OSCE, September 26, 2018.

2209 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 10 December 2018,” OSCE, December 11, 2018.


2214 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 7 April 2019,” OSCE, April 8, 2019.


2216 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 5 June 2019,” OSCE, June 6, 2019.

2217 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 28 July 2019,” OSCE, July 29, 2019; “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 31 July 2019,” OSCE, August 1, 2019; “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 15 July 2019,” OSCE, July 16, 2019.

2218 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 23 August 2019,” OSCE, August 24, 2019.

2219 “Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 26 August 2019,” OSCE, August 27, 2019.