

UKRAINE

Attacks on education continued in eastern Ukraine during the reporting period. Shelling and small arms fire damaged dozens of schools, and attacks on students and education staff continued, although at a reduced rate compared to previous years.

Context

The eight-year-old armed conflict in eastern Ukraine continued during the 2020-2021 reporting period. The 427-kilometer “contact line” divided Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into Ukrainian government-controlled areas (GCA) on the west side, and non-government-controlled areas (NGCA), on the east side.¹⁷⁴³ The UN and International Crisis Group reported that fighting and casualties, already reduced relative to previous years, declined further after a strengthened ceasefire was negotiated in July 2020.¹⁷⁴⁴ However, ceasefire violations increased again throughout 2021, with five times as many violations in December 2021 than during the same month in 2020, according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM).¹⁷⁴⁵ In 2021, Russia positioned soldiers and equipment near the Ukrainian border.¹⁷⁴⁶

Conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions affected 3.4 million people, including one million children, during the reporting period.¹⁷⁴⁷ The OSCE SMM confirmed 129 civilian casualties in 2020, including children, involving shelling, small arms fire, and mines.¹⁷⁴⁸ The same organization recorded 91 civilian casualties in 2021.¹⁷⁴⁹ According to the UN, mines and explosive remnants of war along the contact line put approximately two million people at risk,¹⁷⁵⁰ and harmed many children during the reporting period.¹⁷⁵¹ Checkpoints and Covid-19 closures also severely restricted movement, sometimes dividing families between sides of the contact line, and preventing access to essential services.¹⁷⁵² In 2021, the UN reported that approximately 1.5 million people were internally displaced in Ukraine.¹⁷⁵³

Authorities closed schools and universities throughout the country in March 2020 to limit the spread of Covid-19,¹⁷⁵⁴ which affected over 600,000 children in the east, according to the UN.¹⁷⁵⁵ After intermittent openings in late 2020, schools reopened completely in January 2021; however, a rise in Covid-19 cases in September 2021 caused some schools to close or shift to distance learning.¹⁷⁵⁶

Conflict affected access to education in Donetsk and Luhansk regions during the reporting period.¹⁷⁵⁷ The UN reported that children and teachers at 3,500 educational facilities in eastern Ukraine were affected by ongoing violence.¹⁷⁵⁸ While many schools were repaired after attack, some in close proximity to the contact line remained closed due to the risk of further damage in 2020,¹⁷⁵⁹ requiring some students to travel farther distances to attend class.¹⁷⁶⁰ According to the Ukraine Education Cluster, attacks on schools and closures due to military confrontations in 2020 negatively impacted students’ mental health and wellbeing.¹⁷⁶¹ Right to Education Initiative also reported that authorities on both sides attempted to use education to impart in children particular military, ideological, and patriotic points of view.¹⁷⁶² Additionally, education records of students in the NGCA were not recognized in the GCA, which hindered further study, despite a nationwide campaign by universities to grant admission to students without education certificates from the GCA.¹⁷⁶³

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 30 reported incidents of attacks on schools. Shelling and small arms fire reportedly damaged approximately 25 schools. In comparison, in *Education under Attack 2020*, GCPEA collected reports of 16 attacks on schools in 2018, followed by an increase in 2019, with over 35 incidents.¹⁷⁶⁴

The Education Cluster reported 15 instances of damage to schools in 2020, as well as the temporary closures of five schools due to conflict proximity in Tryokhizbenka and Novotoshivske, Luhansk region (GCA) and Zolote-5, Luhansk region (NGCA).¹⁷⁶⁵ Of these, at least five incidents occurred in April 2020.¹⁷⁶⁶ These attacks were not included in the GCPEA total, however, to avoid double-counting. OSCE SMM also identified 2,500 ceasefire violations within one kilometer of schools in 2020.¹⁷⁶⁷ Finally, The UN reported that between the start of the conflict in March 2014 and September 2020, more than 750 schools were destroyed or damaged, including kindergartens.¹⁷⁶⁸

In 2020, GCPEA identified approximately 17 reports of attacks on schools from the Education Cluster and OSCE SMM.¹⁷⁶⁹

The majority of attacks occurred in the first half of the year, for instance:

- The Education Cluster and OSCE SMM reported that around March 1, 2020, machine gun fire hit and damaged a school approximately 1.5 kilometers from the contact line in Oleksandrivka, Donetsk region (NGCA).¹⁷⁷⁰
- On March 21, 2020, a blast from an unidentified weapon reportedly hit and damaged the same school in Oleksandrivka, Donetsk region (NGCA). According to the Education Cluster, fragments from the attack injured a 17-year-old girl in the schoolyard.¹⁷⁷¹
- On April 2, 2020, shelling damaged School No. 67 in Donetsk region (NGCA) along with several nearby houses, as reported by the Education Cluster.¹⁷⁷²
- The Education Cluster reported that on April 28, 2020, shelling hit and damaged a school in Zolote 5, Luhansk region (NGCA), including a computer classroom, doors, and 32 windows.¹⁷⁷³
- On April 30, 2020, fragments from shelling hit and damaged a school, including two windows, in Zolote 4, Luhansk region (GCA), according to OSCE SMM and the Education Cluster. The school was reportedly closed at the time due to Covid-19 precautions.¹⁷⁷⁴
- OHCHR reported that on October 6, 2020, two boys, aged 15 and 16, were harmed when they picked up a hand grenade which detonated near a school in Makiivka city, Donetsk region (NGCA).¹⁷⁷⁵ GCPEA was not able to confirm whether the boys were students.

In 2021, GCPEA identified approximately 14 reported incidents of attacks on schools from media, the Education Cluster, and OSCE SMM.¹⁷⁷⁶ For example:

- On February 7, March 25, May 31, and around June 1, 2021, small arms fire hit and damaged an operational school in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, Luhansk region (NGCA), including breaking windowpanes on all four occasions, according to the OSCE SMM.¹⁷⁷⁷
- On or around May 8, 2021, bullets damaged a functional school in the Trudivski area of Donetsk city (NGCA), according to OSCE SMM.¹⁷⁷⁸
- On or around July 12, 2021, a functioning school in Holmivskyi, Donetsk region (NGCA), sustained damage to windows, walls, and the playground, from unrecorded weaponry, according to OSCE SMM.¹⁷⁷⁹
- On September 21, 2021, shelling damaged the roof and windows of an operational boarding school in Yasynuvata, Donetsk region (NGCA). According to the director of the school, when the shelling started, all 85 children and school staff were evacuated to the school's shelter.¹⁷⁸⁰

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified approximately five reports of attacks on students, teachers, and education personnel. This marks a decrease compared to *Education under Attack 2020*, when GCPEA identified ten and five reported incidents in 2019 and 2018, respectively.¹⁷⁸¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified five reported attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. Between January 1 and May 4, 2020, the Education Cluster reported four incidents of threats, killings, or injuries of students, teachers, or parents.¹⁷⁸² In addition, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on students:

- On July 17, 2020, hundreds of protesters reportedly marched in Kyiv against draft legislation to postpone Russian-language schools shifting to teaching in Ukrainian. According to media reports, the police used teargas to disperse protesters.¹⁷⁸³

GCPEA did not identify any attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2021.

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- ¹⁷⁵⁵ UNICEF, “Humanitarian Action for Children 2021 - Ukraine,” November 20, 2020, p. 2.
- ¹⁷⁵⁶ UNICEF, “Ukraine Humanitarian Situation Report – July-September 2021,” October 29, 2021, p. 2.
- ¹⁷⁵⁷ UNICEF, “Humanitarian Action for Children 2021 - Ukraine,” November 20, 2020, p. 2.
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- ¹⁷⁵⁹ OCHA, “Ukraine Situation Report,” September 28, 2020, p. 5. OSCE SMM, *Impact of the Conflict on Educational Facilities and Children’s Access to Education in Eastern Ukraine* (Ukraine: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, July 2020), p. 11.
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