



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“Tanks On the Playground”

Attacks on Schools and Military Use of Schools in Ukraine



“Tanks On the Playground”

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Map



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Summary

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, education in the country has been under attack. The full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022 greatly added to the damage and destruction of schools and kindergartens throughout the country and put many children and school staff at risk. The Ukrainian government reported that from February 2022 through October 2023, 3428 educational facilities had been damaged and 365 destroyed. The attacks have had a devastating impact on Ukrainian children's access to education during the war and likely long after, as the repair and reconstruction of schools, particularly amid other destroyed civilian infrastructure, will require major resources and time.

This report documents attacks on schools and military use of schools and kindergartens in the Kyivska, Kharkivska, Chernihivska, and Mykolaivska regions, including the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv, from February through November 2022. It describes the damage this has inflicted on these education facilities, and the actions local authorities have taken to ensure that children enrolled can continue their education. It is based on visits by Human Rights Watch researchers to 50 education facilities, and more than 86 interviews with school officials, local authorities, and witnesses to military operations.

The damage and destruction inflicted on schools described in this report typically occurred when Russian forces captured cities and towns during the early weeks of the fighting. In very few cases were the schools being used by Ukrainian forces, which would have made them legitimate military targets. Schools also suffered damage when Russian forces withdrew from the areas they had occupied and the schools their forces had deployed in, which had become military targets by their presence.

The Ukrainian government has taken several key steps to protect education from attack. In 2019, Ukraine endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Russia has not endorsed the declaration. The Safe Schools Declaration is an international political commitment that aims to protect education during times of war by strengthening the prevention of, and response to, attacks on students, teachers, schools, and universities. Under the declaration, governments commit to implement the "Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict," which urge militaries not to use schools and universities for any purpose in support of the military effort.

Since endorsing the declaration, Ukraine in August 2021 adopted an action plan on its implementation. As of January 2022, 1,000 Ukrainian military officials had been trained in the Safe Schools Declaration and the “Guidelines,” according to the nongovernmental Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. In July, according to information shared with Human Rights Watch by the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, a high-level military order was issued to further restrict military use of educational facilities.

Human Rights Watch is not aware of any steps taken by the Russian government to protect education from attacks.

Most of the damage that schools incurred, and that Human Rights Watch documented, was from aerial attacks, artillery shelling, and rocket strikes. Cluster munitions were also used in a number of attacks. The use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas is likely to cause high civilian casualties. Human Rights Watch researchers, when visiting schools that had been attacked, often found significant damage to roofs, the collapse of walls, and major debris in classrooms.

The basements of many schools and kindergartens, both before and during Russian forces’ occupation of cities and towns, sheltered civilians, from a dozen to hundreds of people. For example, on March 10, 2022, as many as 200 civilians were sheltering in the basement of School Number 5 in Iziurm when a Russian aerial attack struck it twice; none were killed or injured.

Under the laws of war applicable to Russia’s war in Ukraine, schools, like other civilian objects, may not be deliberately attacked unless they are being used for military purposes. Attacks that do not discriminate between combatants and civilians are also prohibited. Warring parties must take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians under their control or when carrying out attacks.

In the regions documented in this report, Russian forces frequently used schools and kindergartens to encamp their soldiers and parked military vehicles and other equipment in schoolyards. In some cases, they used them as medical facilities or to detain civilians. Russian forces occupying schools almost invariably looted and pillaged them of desktop and laptop computers, televisions, electronic blackboards, other school equipment, and heating systems – which are war crimes.

Withdrawing Russian forces left behind burned-out and ransacked classrooms, and the school equipment that was not looted was often broken. Russian soldiers vandalized schools by painting graffiti on walls, typically with expressions of hate towards Ukraine and Ukrainians.

For instance, when Russian soldiers occupied a school in Borodianka, in Kyivska region for about a month in March 2022, they used the school building as a base and to fire at Ukrainian forces. Human Rights Watch researchers who visited the school in June 2022 saw the extensive damage to it caused by Ukrainian return fire, including from two direct hits, one of which caused a fire, further damaging the school. Russian soldiers left behind anti-Ukrainian graffiti on classroom walls and a flag with a Nazi swastika and used the gymnasium for target practice.

International human rights law, which remains applicable during wartime, provides for the right to education. Children who attended schools that were severely damaged or destroyed in attacks often relocated to other schools. In other cases, children are compelled to attend a shortened school day or study in shifts, as a smaller number of functioning schools attempt to accommodate an increased number of students. Many others participate in distance learning either because they are enrolled in schools that were damaged, reside in areas of active hostilities, or cannot travel to other schools due to distance or lack of access to transportation. Some but not all distance learning entails online classes, which are subject to electricity and internet outages due to the hostilities. The additional difficulties facing children in Russia-occupied areas will be the subject of future Human Rights Watch reporting.

The war overall has severely disrupted children's education and has had a significant negative impact on their psychosocial well-being. A nationwide survey, conducted by the Ukrainian think tank Cedos with the foundations SavED and the International Renaissance Foundation between December 2022 and January 2023, found that 72 percent of Ukrainian parents said their children needed additional measures to compensate for educational gaps in their knowledge and skills due to the Covid-19 pandemic followed by Russia's full-scale invasion. The majority of parents also reported symptoms of stress in their children, such as deterioration of the quality and duration of sleep, problems with concentration, and difficulties in communication.

Human Rights Watch has previously reported on attacks on schools in Ukraine. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Russian forces have attacked schools and kindergartens, including schools for children with disabilities; unlawfully detained Ukrainian prisoners-of-war and civilians who reported being tortured, raped, and otherwise ill-treated in schools; and used schools to detain civilians in the abusive filtration process. For example, indiscriminate Russian attacks in the Kharkivska and Chernihivska regions included attacks on schools not being used for military purposes. A February 2016 report documented attacks on schools and use of schools for military purposes in eastern Ukraine during the initial phase of the war and the serious impact it had on children's safety and education.

International investigators have also documented attacks on schools and raised concerns about access to education for children in Ukraine. In December 2022, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported that "[d]estroyed and demolished schools in many cases, especially in the zone of military operations, prevent physical access to education," and that online education is compromised by "attacks on the energy system." It also noted the particular difficulties of ensuring access to education for children in formerly occupied regions, such as Kharkivska and Khersonska regions.

The renovation of partially damaged and destroyed schools has varied greatly in different parts of Ukraine. For example, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science reported in January 2023 that 87 destroyed educational facilities (or 71 percent of the total) were being restored in Kyivska region, including 10 schools in Borodianska and Buchanska communities, 11 in Makarivska, and 8 in Ivankivska.

By contrast, in Kharkivska region, reconstruction efforts have been much slower, due to the prolonged Russian occupation and ongoing hostilities: only 13 of the 296 affected schools had been repaired as of January 2023. In some areas, particularly those affected by intense fighting, whole neighborhoods need to be rebuilt for the local authorities to address damaged and destroyed schools.

Recommendations

To the Russian Government

- Immediately cease all unlawful attacks, including deliberate, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks on civilians and civilian objects.
- Cease the use of unguided rockets, cluster munitions, and other explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.
- Recognize that schools not being used for military purposes are civilian objects that may not be targets of attack.
- Take appropriate disciplinary and legal action against military personnel, regardless of rank, responsible for unlawful attacks, including as a matter of command responsibility.
- Take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools by armed forces and Russia-controlled armed groups, as encouraged in UN Security Council Resolution 2225 (2015).
- Take all feasible precautions to avoid the loss of civilian lives and damage to civilian objects, including schools, in the conduct of military operations.
- Take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects, including schools, under their forces' control from the effects of attacks.
- Endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. Implement the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.
- Join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

To Concerned Governments, the United Nations, Other International Actors

- Continue to publicly condemn Russia's war crimes and other grave abuses in Ukraine.
- Make clear to the Russian government that its commanders will be held accountable for unlawful attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including schools, in Ukraine.
- Publicly seek support for domestic and international investigations of possible war crimes and other violations of international law committed by parties to the conflict and bring all those responsible to account.

- The UN secretary-general should continue monitoring and reporting to the Security Council on the conduct of Russia’s armed forces in Ukraine for unlawful attacks on schools and the military use of schools.
- Urge Russia to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. Assist Ukraine to implement the “Guidelines.”

To Donors and Humanitarian Organizations:

- Support the equitable reconstruction of schools in all regions of Ukraine, require strict adherence to accessibility standards mandatory under Ukrainian law, and monitor compliance.
- Support Ukraine’s efforts to ensure safe education to all children, through provision of training, equipment, technology, and devices to facilitate online learning, including training in use of the equipment and provision of necessary supplies.
- Support Ukraine in the implementation of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

To the Ukrainian Government

- Take all feasible precautions to avoid the loss of civilian lives and damage to civilian objects, including schools, in the conduct of military operations.
- Take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects, including schools, under their forces’ control from the effects of attacks.
- Take appropriate disciplinary and legal action against military personnel, regardless of rank, responsible for unlawful attacks, including as a matter of command responsibility.
- Implement the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.
- Take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools by the armed forces, as encouraged in UN Security Council Resolution 2225 (2015).
- Continue to strive to ensure safe access to education for all children in Ukraine, including children with disabilities, through the training of teachers in remote learning techniques, facilitating access to laptops and other technology to

- facilitate remote education to teachers and students, and equipping schools with bomb shelters, power generators and stable internet connections.
- Ensure repair and reconstruction of schools as promptly as possible, including through international support and funds provided from the government, to make sure reconstruction is not entirely dependent on regional and local budgets, which may lead to disparities in quality and accessibility of education across Ukraine. Schools that have suffered significant damage and are no longer in hostility zones should be prioritized for repair, ensuring that they meet safety standards and provide a conducive learning environment for students.
 - Ensure that all reconstruction efforts adhere to accessibility standards for students with disabilities, such as is required under Ukrainian education law, state construction standards, licensing requirements, and security regulations. All education facilities should be physically accessible and equipped with ramps allowing entrances to buildings, classrooms and toilets for wheelchair users. All educational facilities should be designed and retrofitted, respectively, to comply with Universal Design standards, namely the design and composition of an environment that may be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest degree possible with adaptation.
 - Continue to construct modular or temporary schools until permanent structures are restored.
 - Ensure that school buses and other transportation are available for students and teachers who need to travel to other areas to attend school.
 - Join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Methodology

Human Rights Watch researchers conducted on-site research for this report between March and November 2022 during trips to the Chernihivska, Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, and Kyivska regions of Ukraine, as well as the cities of Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson, and the town of Snihurivka in the Mykolaivska region. Researchers also conducted follow-up interviews with a number of school directors and other interviewees in October 2022 and May 2023 in the Chernihivska, Kharkivska, and Kyivska regions.

Specifically, researchers visited schools and kindergartens in Bucha, Kropyvnya, Zahaltsy, Borodianka, Bohdanivka, Katyuzhanka, Irpin, Lukashi, Rozvazhiv in Kyivska region; Nizhyn, Krupychpole, Dorohynka, Chernihiv, Novyi Bykiv, , Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske, Yahidne in Chernihivska region; Kharkiv, Iziium, Merefa, Balakliya, Borova, Yakovlivka in Kharkivska region; and Snihurivka in Mykolaivska region.

Researchers visited a total of 50 schools and kindergartens and conducted 86 interviews. They conducted telephone interviews with school officials in October 2022 and May 2023 to gather information regarding the reopening of damaged schools for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years.

Human Rights Watch made all interviewees aware of the purpose of the interviews and all interviewees agreed to speak on a voluntary basis. Human Rights Watch did not provide interviewees with any financial incentives to speak with us. Most interviewees agreed to have their names used in this report. Human Rights Watch withheld the names of interviewees who expressed concern about talking openly.

Human Rights Watch sent letters to the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development on November 10, 2022 with questions related to attacks on education since February 2022 and received a response from the Ministry of Education and Science on November 28. Relevant material from the response is included in this report and the full letter can be found in the report's annex.

In September 2023, Human Rights Watch sent letters to the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and the Russian Defense Ministry. Relevant information from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense' response, received on September 27, is included in this report.

We have not received a response from the Russian Ministry of Defense.

Attacks on Schools and Military Use of Schools

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 3790 educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed countrywide due to hostilities.¹ An unknown number have been fully or partially occupied by military forces for varying periods.

This chapter details examples of attacks on and military use of schools in the Kyivska, Kharkivska, Chernihivska and Mykolaivska regions, and the cities of Chernihiv and Kharkiv. The attacks on and military use of schools documented in this report took place between late February 2022 and November 2022. Some of the schools described are in regions that Russian forces temporarily occupied. Others are in areas that Russian forces never occupied or controlled.

Note on Ukraine’s school system

In Ukraine, education is compulsory for nine years for children ages 7 to 15 years old, and free through the completion of secondary education. Children age 6 or 7 enroll in primary school (grades 1-4). After that, children attend secondary school, which consists of middle school (grades 5-9) and high school (grades 10-12).

Students frequently attend the same school for their primary and secondary education (grades 1-12).

Lyceums and gymnasiums are secondary education institutions, private or government-funded, that provide specialized academic training in a particular area.

Kindergartens are pre-primary educational facilities for children ages 3 to 6. Pre-primary education is not compulsory.

¹ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Interactive Map of Destroyed and Damaged Education Institutions,” <https://saveschools.in.ua/> (accessed October 10, 2023).

Attacks included aerial bombardments and artillery shelling that damaged schools through direct hits. In others, attacks struck nearby areas, and their blast waves damaged schools. In at least three instances documented, damage was caused by Russian forces firing on schools, including schools they had occupied, as they withdrew.

Russian forces' military use of schools included encamping soldiers in schools, treating wounded soldiers, and detaining civilians, who often were tortured or otherwise ill-treated. Russian forces also deployed armored or other military vehicles on school property, dug trenches around school buildings, and stored ammunition in schools. In some instances, they directed fighting from schools or launched attacks from school property. The use of schools for military purposes often made them subject to attack as military targets.

Ukrainian forces' use of schools included housing soldiers in schools and placing checkpoints and military equipment near school buildings. They also used small numbers of soldiers or armed Territorial Defense Force members to provide security for civilians sheltering in schools, which can increase the risk of attack.

The Ukrainian government regularly publishes reports on the number of educational facilities damaged from hostilities and maintains a website dedicated to documenting these incidents.² As of October 2023, the Ukrainian government reported that 3428 educational institutions had been damaged and 365 completely destroyed.³ Additionally, as of February 2023, 127 early childhood and pre-school facilities were destroyed and 942 damaged.⁴ In a November 28, 2022 letter to Human Rights Watch, Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science stated that schools had been damaged in 19 regions of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv.⁵ The government's website tracking damage to schools cites the largest

² Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, "Interactive Map of Destroyed and Damaged Education Institutions," <https://saveschools.in.ua/> (accessed October 10, 2023).

³ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, "Interactive Map of Destroyed and Damaged Education Institutions," <https://saveschools.in.ua/> (accessed October 10, 2023).

⁴ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, "Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of December 2022)," <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed May 30, 2023).

⁵ Letter from Oleg Yeresko, director general, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine Directorate of Inclusive and Out-of-School Education, to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022.

number of attacks in the Donetsk region, followed by the Kharkivska and Mykolaivska regions.⁶

Relevant Laws of War

The war in Ukraine is considered an international armed conflict under the laws of war, also known as international humanitarian law. Applicable treaties include the four Geneva Conventions of 1949⁷ and the First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).⁸

Under the laws of war, parties to a conflict must distinguish at all times between combatants and civilians and attack only military objectives.⁹ Parties are prohibited from deliberately attacking civilians, conducting attacks that do not discriminate between combatants and civilians, or would cause disproportionate harm to civilians compared to the expected military gain from the attack.¹⁰

The laws of war similarly protect civilian objects, which are buildings or other structures that are not lawful military targets. Attacks targeting civilian objects—such as residences, places of worship and schools—are prohibited unless they are being used for military purposes. When military forces deploy in what is normally a civilian object, the object may become a legitimate military target.¹¹

⁶ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Interactive Map of Destroyed and Damaged Education Institutions,” <https://saveschools.in.ua/> (accessed October 10, 2023).

⁷ Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field (First Geneva Convention), 75 U.N.T.S. 31, entered into force October 21, 1950; Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea (Second Geneva Convention), 75 U.N.T.S. 85, entered into force October 21, 1950; Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention), 75 U.N.T.S. 135, entered into force October 21, 1950; Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), 75 U.N.T.S. 287, entered into force October 21, 1950.

⁸ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 1125 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force December 7, 1978; see also Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), adopted June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force December 7, 1978. Russia and Ukraine are both parties to the Geneva Conventions and Protocol I.

⁹ See Protocol I, art. 43(2). Military objectives are personnel and objects that are making an effective contribution to military action and their destruction, capture, or neutralization offers a definite military advantage. This would include enemy fighters, weapons and ammunition, and objects being used for military purposes, such as houses and stores in which soldiers are deployed. *Ibid.*, art. 52(2).

¹⁰ See Protocol I, art. 51.

¹¹ See Protocol I, art. 52(1).

The use of heavy artillery, aerial bombs, and rockets against military objectives in populated areas poses a grave threat to civilians in armed conflict. Explosive weapons used in populated areas heightens concerns of unlawful indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.¹²

The laws of war require parties to a conflict to take constant care during military operations to protect the civilian population.¹³ This includes doing everything feasible to verify that targets are military objectives.¹⁴

The laws of war do not specifically prohibit the military use of schools. Encamping troops or storing ammunition in a school, or parking or deploying military vehicles on school grounds, makes attacks on schools more likely. The forces encamped in schools need to take into account the obligations of warring parties to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians under their control against the effects of attacks,¹⁵ to avoid locating military objectives near densely populated areas,¹⁶ to remove as feasible civilians from the vicinity of military objectives,¹⁷ and to provide children special respect and protection.¹⁸

The Fourth Geneva Convention, which addresses the responsibilities of an occupying power such as Russia, permits the detention of civilians only for “imperative reasons of security.”¹⁹ Anyone deprived of liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, and medical attention.²⁰ Torture and other ill-treatment are banned without exception.²¹

¹² See Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, DATE, <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/peaceandsecurity/ewipa/EWIPA-Political-Declaration-Final-Rev-25052022.pdf>

¹³ See Protocol I, art. 57(1).

¹⁴ See Protocol I, art. 57(2)(a).

¹⁵ See Protocol I, art. 58(c).

¹⁶ See Protocol I, art. 58(b).

¹⁷ See Protocol I, art. 58(a).

¹⁸ See Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 23, 24, 38, 50, 76, and 89; Protocol I, art. 70(1).

¹⁹ See Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 78.

²⁰ See Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 76, 85, 87, 89-92 and 142.

²¹ See, for example, Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 32; Protocol I, art. 75(2).

Schools and other cultural property, even if public property, are specifically protected against “[s]eizure..., destruction or wilful damage,” which are war crimes.²²

Serious violations of the laws of war committed by individuals with criminal intent—that is, deliberately or recklessly—are war crimes. War crimes include a wide array of offenses such as deliberate, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks on civilians or civilian objects, summary killings, enforced disappearance, torture, and pillage. Individuals also may be held criminally liable for attempting to commit a war crime, as well as assisting in, facilitating, or aiding a war crime. Commanders who knew or should have known about war crimes by their forces and did not prevent them or punish those responsible are liable as a matter of command responsibility.²³

Kyivska Region

School staff and residents in cities and towns in the Kyivska region told Human Rights Watch researchers that Russian forces used six schools, a former school, and three kindergartens for military purposes. All six of the schools had considerable damage. There was damage evident at five other schools that Human Rights Watch also visited, but it was not possible to identify witnesses who could describe the attacks.

Bucha School Number 3

Russian forces initially tried to seize Bucha, 30 kilometers west of Kyiv, on February 27, retreated, and then returned and occupied the city from March 4 to March 31, 2022. During the occupation, Russian forces committed numerous war crimes against Ukrainian civilians, including summary executions and other unlawful killings, torture and ill-treatment, rape, and looting.²⁴

Upon occupying Bucha, Russian forces took over School Number 3. According to the school’s deputy director, Halyna Ivanivna School Number 3 had 1,600 students enrolled

²² See Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land annexed to the Fourth Hague Convention of 18 October 1907 (the “1907 Hague Regulations”), art. 56.

²³ See Protocol I, art. 86(2).

²⁴ “Ukraine: Russian Forces Trail of Death in Bucha: Preserving Evidence Crucial for War Crimes Prosecutions,” Human Rights Watch Press Release, April 21, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/21/ukraine-russian-forces-trail-death-bucha>.

prior to Russia’s invasion, and 1,580 for the 2022-2023 school year. The number was lower in 2022-23 because some families had moved elsewhere.

During the occupation, about 300 civilians, including children, were living in the school basement, using it as a shelter during the fighting. Russian soldiers removed them from the school and encamped there. Halyna Ivanivna said they “parked tanks on the playground” and other military vehicles in the schoolyard and also stored boxes of munitions in the school and schoolyard. When Human Rights Watch visited the school in June 2023, track marks were visible on paved surfaces on the school grounds.²⁵



The remains of damaged and looted computers at School No. 3, Bucha, Kyivska region, Ukraine, following Russia’s use of the school, June 23, 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Halyna Ivanivna said that the staff, including her, returned to the school building after Russian forces left and witnessed that Russian forces left behind garbage and feces throughout the school. Russian military also vandalized the school by painting graffiti on the walls, including crosshairs that they used for target practice and a flag with a Nazi swastika. They smashed televisions, computers, and printers, and broke doors, doorframes, and windows. Russian soldiers apparently also looted food and kitchen equipment.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Halyna Ivanivna, deputy director, Bucha school Number 3, Bucha, June 23, 2022. Halyna Ivanivna is her first name and patronymic.

The school was damaged from artillery strikes, including to the roof and windows, during fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces, which began in Bucha on February 27. Two splatter patterns consistent with a strike from cluster munitions, an inherently indiscriminate weapon, were visible in the schoolyard. It was not evident which military force was responsible for those attacks.²⁶

Due to the extensive damage to the school and the ongoing threat of Russian attacks, children were learning online.

In October 2022, with support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other donors, renovations were underway to replace the windows, façade, and roof.²⁷

“In September, we arranged for primary school children to attend in person in part of the building that was less damaged,” said Halyna Ivanivna. “However, the constant air raid alerts and increased risk of attacks in the Kyivska region made us shift to online learning.”²⁸

She said that as of May 2023, the windows and the roof had been replaced but the main school building was still being renovated, work anticipated to be completed by September 2023. In the meantime, children were studying in two shifts in one of the renovated annexes to the school building.²⁹

Borodianka School Number 1 (renamed Borodianka Lyceum Number 1 in January 2023). Borodianka, a town approximately 60 kilometers northwest of Kyiv, came under heavy Russian artillery shelling and airstrikes in the early days of the invasion. The Russian military entered Borodianka on February 28 and remained there until their withdrawal from the area by March 30, 2022.

About 600 students were enrolled for the 2022-2023 academic year in grades 1 through 11 in Borodianka’s School Number 1.³⁰

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Halyna Ivanivna, Bucha, June 23, 2022.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch follow-up telephone interview with Halyna Ivanivna, October 25, 2022.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch follow-up telephone interview with Halyna Ivanivna, October 25, 2022.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch follow-up telephone interview with Halyna Ivanivna, May 22, 2023.

³⁰ School Number 1 was renamed Lyceum Number 1 in January 2023.

The three-story school is in an area near several municipal administrative buildings and the police station. It sustained extensive damage from rocket and bomb attacks, said the school's director Inna Romaniuk.³¹ Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces had set up a checkpoint across the street, approximately 100 meters from the school. On February 26, a Russian airstrike hit the checkpoint, blowing out some of the school's windows. Romaniuk said the school building was directly hit on February 27 after Territorial Defense Forces ran towards the school during fighting and were fired upon by Russian forces. Human Rights Watch did not independently confirm any damage to the school from this attack.

Russian forces took over School Number 1 a few days after they entered the town and encamped in and launched attacks from it, Romaniuk said.³² They dug trenches and placed heavy weapons and equipment in the schoolyard. Romaniuk said:

Returning to the school was extremely upsetting. It was impossible to hold back tears. What they [the Russian forces] left behind when they left-- it was horrible. In the cafeteria, they set up a bath [in the sink]. In another room there was blood on the walls. ... A sniper had set up in a school bathroom.

They broke all the computers, ripped out the components and filled everything with dirt. ... They simply stole the laptops. Everything was looted, broken. ... They tore the interactive whiteboards off the walls and used them [as shields] to cover the windows. ... The wallpaper is ripped. The windows are all smashed. The desks are all broken. Everywhere [there is] a burned smell, feces everywhere. They drew [Nazi] swastikas on the walls. They had a field kitchen, and they used the school desks [as firewood] to heat their stove.³³

In the room with blood on the walls, researchers saw a saline drip bag hanging from a hook, suggesting the room was used to treat injuries.³⁴

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Romaniuk, director, Borodianka Lyceum Number 1, Borodianka, June 24, 2022.

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Romaniuk, Borodianka, June 24, 2022.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Romaniuk, June 24, 2022.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch visit to Borodianka Lyceum Number 1, June 24, 2022.

In late March, when Russian soldiers occupied the building and fought from it, two strikes hit the second and third floors, presumably launched by Ukrainian forces. Romaniuk said that as a result of the blast waves, there were cracks in the building façade and the foundation. A direct hit apparently blew a large hole in the gymnasium roof. A fire started, completely burning the foreign literature classroom and damaging the chemistry and physics classrooms.³⁵

Human Rights Watch researchers visited School Number 1 in June 2022 to examine the damage. There was a large hole through the center of the school’s roof. In one third-floor classroom, the roof had collapsed completely, and, in another, there was a large crack in the external wall.³⁶ There were also burned-out classrooms and broken windows. Computers, televisions and blackboards were riddled with bullet holes. In a small bathroom that Romaniuk said had been used by a sniper, sandbags were piled up by the window, with a small hole between them looking out onto the schoolyard.³⁷

Russian soldiers had vandalized the school. On classroom walls they spray-painted insults in Russian directed at Ukrainians. They drew the letter “V,” one of the Russian military symbols for the war against Ukraine, on doors, walls, and a water heater. Spray-painted on hallway walls were the phrases “Russia – our beloved country!” and “Russia, we love you.” One desk had graffiti in black marker in Russian listing three Russian cities, “Moscow, Makhachkala, Khabarovsk.”

Romaniuk said in October 2022 that a charitable organization had helped develop a renovation plan for the school, but as yet there was no funding to undertake repairs, and that they would “be lucky” to complete reconstruction by the start of the next school year.³⁸ She had calculated the cost of replacing only the damaged and stolen equipment and repairing the recently renovated cafeteria at 30 million hryvna (US\$814,000).³⁹ In the meantime, throughout the school year 2022-2023, grades 5-11 were learning online; first

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Romaniuk, Borodianka, June 24, 2022.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch visit to Borodianka Lyceum Number 1, June 24, 2022.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch visit to Borodianka Lyceum Number 1, June 24, 2022.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Inna Romaniuk, October 26, 2022.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Inna Romaniuk, October 26, 2022.

graders were attending classes in another local school; and grades 2-4 attended the school in the morning and studied online in the afternoon.⁴⁰

As of May 31, 2023, the school, renamed Borodianka Lyceum Number 1, was still undergoing reconstruction and the school administration planned to fully reopen the school for the 2023-2024 school year.⁴¹ It had 594 children enrolled for 2022-2023, including 16 children studying remotely from the Russia-occupied areas of Khersonska region.⁴²

“The children really want to return to school,” said Romaniuk. “And we really want to save our school. The main task is to keep our team, revive and revitalize our school. We really believe in it.”⁴³

Bohdanivka Lyceum and Kindergarten

Russian forces occupied Bohdanivka, a town about 40 kilometers east of Kyiv, from early March till March 29, 2022. Bohdanivka’s Lyceum, with a pre-war enrollment of up to 360 children in grades 1 to 12, and the kindergarten, are located 500 meters apart.

Russian forces occupied the lyceum from March 8 until March 24. Vasyl, a 52-year-old resident who lives opposite the school and whose three children, now 32, 28 and 16, all attended it, said that he saw Russian forces entering the school at about noon on March 8. Vasyl, who declined to share his last name, said that he overheard Russian soldiers saying that they were from the 90th tank division. “They told me they were from Chebarkul [in the southern Urals in Russia],” he said.⁴⁴ At one point, he said, the soldiers came to his house and shot and killed his dog.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Inna Romaniuk, October 26, 2022.

⁴¹Inna Romanyuk’s Facebook Page,

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbidoHJUaszrijtyamz6LMcSzN2d2gP2PuvNdWjsHAeWow1dViV7zrfn2QGx8iNNx5ArVI&id=100020956458065 (accessed May 15, 2023)

⁴² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Inna Romaniuk, June 19, 2023.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Romaniuk, Borodianka, June 24, 2022.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Vasyl, Bohdanivka, June 25, 2022.



The damaged playground of the town kindergarten in Bohdanivka, Ukraine, June 25, 2022. In March 2022, Russian forces stored munitions and parked military vehicles at the kindergarten, which was later destroyed in unclear circumstances. © 2022 Human Rights Watch.

Vasyl said the day they took over the school, he saw Russian soldiers bring in 22 people in a Russian army Ural van as well as several military vehicles, including three tanks, one armored personnel carrier, and one MT-LB, an amphibious armored vehicle. A sniper deployed in the window of the school across from Vasyl's house. He said that wounded soldiers were brought to the school, leading him to believe they were using it as a medical facility. The Russian forces also stored munitions at a house around the corner from the school, where he saw Grad rockets, mortar shells, and a TOS-1 "Buratino," a multi-barrel thermobaric rocket launcher mounted on a tank chassis, as well as an Igla complex, a portable anti-aircraft missile system.

Vasyl also described attacks striking the lyceum, presumably by Ukrainian forces against Russian forces that were occupying the school:

The school was fired on at least twice from what I can remember. On March 28 the larger hit took place. It started a fire. The Russians were running around, putting out the fire. There could have been some other hits. The nearby munitions storage totally burned. On March 29 our guys [Ukrainian forces] entered the city.

Human Rights Watch researchers visited Bohdanivka Lyceum in June 2022. There was extensive fire damage to a significant part of the two-story brick building, and there were burned desks, equipment and other debris and broken glass. Part of the roof collapsed into the building as did some of the ceilings between the first and second floors. The external wall in one stairwell was completely missing. A burned hull was all that remained of one school bus in the yard. A smaller school bus had lost all of its windows.⁴⁵

Vasyl said that Russian forces also stored munitions and parked military vehicles at the nearby Bohdanivka kindergarten, which was completely destroyed in unclear circumstances.⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch researchers visited the kindergarten and found only two partial brick walls and a large pile of debris where the kindergarten once stood.⁴⁷

As of May 2023, neither the school nor the kindergarten had been renovated.⁴⁸

Irpin School Number 2

Irpin, a suburb approximately 25 kilometers northwest of Kyiv, saw heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces in late February and early March 2022.

Irpin School Number 2, where a total of 1,720 children studied before Russia's 2022 invasion, sustained considerable damage. The school's caretaker said the school premises were hit nine times during the fighting on March 5 and 6. Three strikes hit the school building and six hit the schoolyard. Part of the school caught fire, destroying the cafeteria. On March 6, an unknown number of civilians were sheltering in the basement when the strike hit the school building.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Vasyl, Bohdanivka, June 25, 2022.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Vasyl, Bohdanivka, June 25, 2022

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch visit to Bohdanivka, June 25, 2022.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch visit to Bohdanivka, May 25, 2023.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with the school caretaker, Irpin, June 23, 2022.

Other schools in Irpin were damaged but Human Rights Watch was not able to interview any residents or school officials. School Number 12 had a large hole in the roof; School Number 1 had damage to many windows; and Lyceum Number 3 was completely destroyed—in parts of the school no walls remained.

After ongoing repair, School Number 12 reopened in September 2022. School Number 1 reopened in February 2023, accepting students from other Irpin schools that were still not operational. As of May 2023, Lyceum Number 3 was still undergoing reconstruction.⁵⁰

Kukhari School and Kukhari Kindergarten

On February 26, 2022, Russian forces entered Kukhari, a village 90 kilometers northwest of Kyiv with a pre-war population of about 730. They occupied and looted the village school before the Ukrainian military forced them to withdraw on March 10, according to a village leader, Halyna Herasymenko. Herasymenko said that the school sustained two direct hits during intensive fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces in late February and March, involving aircraft, helicopters, and artillery shelling. Much of the village was also heavily damaged, she said.⁵¹

The school’s director, Valentina Zarytska, expressed her feelings about the badly damaged school:

It was a very beautiful village school. Teachers poured their hearts and souls into it. There were beautiful paintings on the walls. When we first entered the ruined school, we couldn’t hold back tears. Of course, we all, and the children and parents, want our school to be restored. We want to get back to working here. We want our life to go back to normal.⁵²

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in June 2022 and saw gaping holes and other extensive damage across the roof. Nearly all of the windows were blown out and

⁵⁰ According to an information stand on site, Lyceum Number 3 was closed for reconstruction until August 2023. Renovation of School Number 1 was completed in February 2023 when the school reopened and accepted students from other schools in the area that were damaged or destroyed, according to the school’s bus driver whom Human Rights Watch interviewed on May 26, 2023. Renovation of School Number 12 was completed by September 2022, according to one of the parents whom Human Rights Watch interviewed in Irpin on May 26, 2023.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Halina Herasymenko, community leader, Kukhari, June 24, 2022.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Valentina Zarytska, director, Kukhari school, June 24, 2022.

debris from broken windows and window frames littered the school's perimeter, classrooms, and hallways. In various classrooms, bookshelves were broken, there were large cracks in several walls, and the floors were covered with debris and broken glass.⁵³

Zarytska said that of the 90 children enrolled in the school before the war, 60 remained in the village, the others having relocated to other parts of Ukraine or abroad. The school did not open for the 2022-2023 school year due to the damage the building sustained, and children were learning online for most of the school year.⁵⁴

Herasymenko told Human Rights Watch by phone in May 2023 that primary school students attended a school in a temporary modular structure and secondary students were studying online. The kindergarten remained closed and had not been renovated.⁵⁵

Zahaltsi School and Kindergarten

Zahaltsi is a village about 60 kilometers west of Kyiv, which Russian forces occupied from March 20 to 31, 2022. Before the war, 287 children from five nearby villages studied in the local school, where grades 1 through 12 were taught. The village kindergarten, located across the street from the school, had been attended by 78 children.

The school's administrative manager, Liudmila Ostapenko, said both the school and the kindergarten came under fire in early March, and Russian soldiers encamped in the buildings for 11 days, beginning on March 20.

Ostapenko said that on March 7, around 5 a.m., a Russian aerial bombardment struck the side of the kindergarten. About 50 civilians, displaced by fighting from nearby Borodianka, had been sheltering in the basement at the time. Two members of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces were also in the kindergarten. No one was injured, but the building suffered significant damage. A second munition struck the yard of the kindergarten soon after. There was a Ukrainian military checkpoint a few hundred meters away from the school at that time.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch visit to Khukhari school, June 24, 2022.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Halina Herasymenko, Kukhari, October 25, 2022.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Halina Herasymenko, Kukhari, May 22, 2023.

Ostapenko said that on March 20, after Russian forces had occupied the village, they used the school and kindergarten as a base. They deployed heavy weapons and equipment in the yard, including Grad rocket launchers, and fired them at Ukrainian positions. “Russian soldiers seriously damaged the school premises and looted it,” Ostapenko said. “They damaged or stole 58 computers and 27 laptops. Many of the rooms had interactive boards, which have also been destroyed.”⁵⁶

Before retaking Zahaltsi on March 31, Ukrainian forces attacked the Russian position at the kindergarten, which caused serious damage to the second floor and the roof.⁵⁷

Human Rights Watch researchers visited Zahaltsi in June 2022 and documented damage to the ground floor exterior wall of one corner of the school, and a large hole in the side of the school. Most of the school’s windows were broken. Interior walls and ceilings in some classrooms and hallways were damaged by fragmentation or had bullet holes in them. There were broken and dismantled computers and empty walls with outlines where interactive whiteboards had been. The letter “V,” a Russian military symbol, was spray-painted on the wall, next to photos of school students and the letter “Z,” another Russian military symbol, was written in black marker on another wall.⁵⁸

The kindergarten had large holes in the roof and in the façade of the second floor, extensive damage to the ground-floor exterior wall on one side, a one-meter hole in one ground-floor wall, and dozens of broken windows that had been covered in plastic. There was also a wide, shallow crater and a completely burned car in the yard next to the kindergarten.⁵⁹

As of October 2022, the school and kindergarten had not been renovated and there was no timeline for doing so. The school had switched to distance learning.⁶⁰ School reconstruction only began in May 2023. In the meantime, primary school children started attending classes in weekly shifts in a prefab structure while the rest of the children continued to study online.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Ostapenko, administrative manager, Zahaltsi school, Zahaltsi, June 24, 2022.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Ostapenko, June 24, 2022.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch visit to Zahaltsi school and kindergarten, June 24, 2022.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to Zahaltsi school and kindergarten, June 24, 2022.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Serhii, community leader, October 26, 2022.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch follow-up telephone interview with Liudmila Ostapenko, May 22, 2023.

Chernihiv and Chernihivska Region

Chernihiv City

Russian forces surrounded and heavily shelled the city of Chernihiv, some 150 kilometers north of Kyiv, in February, March, and April 2022. They did not occupy Chernihiv city and withdrew from the towns and villages they had occupied in the Chernihivska region in early April.

Before the full-scale invasion, 34 schools operated in Chernihiv with about 28,000 students, according to the head of the Chernihiv City Council Education Department. As of June 2023, 31 schools were functioning in Chernihiv, and most had been able to return to full-time, in-person learning.⁶²

Out of five schools that Human Rights Watch visited in Chernihiv, two of them -- School Number 18 and School Number 21—were so badly damaged that they shut down indefinitely. Two other schools were closed for 13 and 14 months, respectively, for repairs.⁶³ School Number 36, which Human Rights Watch did not visit, was partially damaged and shut down after the authorities made a decision not to renovate it.⁶⁴

Chernihiv School Number 13

Olena Ashmankevych, the deputy director of Chernihiv School Number 13, said the school was shelled twice—on March 6 and March 10—presumably by Russian forces. She said, “None of the shelling hit the school directly, but it suffered from the blast effects. The closest hit was 150 to 300 meters away from the school building. The blast wave damaged the roof of the school and over 100 windows.”⁶⁵

There were approximately 100 people sheltering in the school basement at the time of the attacks, including the school’s students, their families, and many older people, according to Ashmankevych. None were injured.⁶⁶

⁶² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, head of the Chernihiv City Council Education Department, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Olena Ashmankevych, deputy director, School Number 13, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Olena Ashmankevych, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

One witness said that several graduates of the school who were members of the Territorial Defense Forces guarded the school to prevent looting.⁶⁷ The Safe School Declaration “Guidelines” state that the use of armed forces personnel to carry out such functions in or around schools should be avoided whenever possible as it could compromise the school’s protected status, with civilians instead carrying out such protection functions.⁶⁸

Families and graduates of the school and a foreign aid organization helped fund the repairs to the roof and windows.⁶⁹ The city council allocated funds to renovate and equip the school’s bomb shelter. The school fully reopened in April 2023 for its own 380 students as well as more than 800 students, teachers, and other staff, from School Number 18 and School Number 21, which were both destroyed in the fighting.⁷⁰

Chernihiv School Number 19

School Number 19 had a pre-invasion enrollment of 1,700 students in grades 1 through 9. Russian forces carried out attacks that repeatedly struck and severely damaged the school in March 2022. The first was by Russian aerial bombardment on March 6, and then by apparent cluster munition attacks on March 12 and March 15.

Approximately 550 civilians used the school’s basement as a bomb shelter from late February into April 2022. The school director, Liudmila Shelypets, said:

For the first five days of the war, I was organizing the work of the shelter: searching for mattresses, arranging food preparation in the school cafeteria. My duty was to arrange for people to stay in the shelter and to secure the school equipment.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witness (name withheld), Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

⁶⁸ Guideline 5: “The fighting forces of parties to armed conflict should not be employed to provide security for schools and universities, except when alternative means of providing essential security are not available. If possible, appropriately trained civilian personnel should be used to provide security for schools and universities. If necessary, consideration should also be given to evacuating children, students and staff to a safer location. (a) If fighting forces are engaged in security tasks related to schools and universities, their presence within the grounds or buildings should be avoided if at all possible in order to avoid compromising the establishment’s civilian status and disrupting the learning environment.” Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, March 18, 2014, http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_guidelines_en.pdf (accessed August 17, 2023).

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Olena Ashmankevych, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Shelypets, director, School Number 19, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

She described life for civilians during March just after the hostilities began:

For three weeks we [Chernihiv residents] were in complete isolation, when the main bridge [to the town] got blown up – no food, no heat, no water, no proper toilet. ... For the entire month, the city was shelled relentlessly, bombers were flying and we heard constant explosions. Sometimes they were at midnight, sometimes at 4:30 in the morning.

On March 6, Shelypets was in the school basement at about 6:30 p.m. when she heard a plane flying low overhead. There were no Ukrainian military forces at the school, but some members of Territorial Defense Forces were at the shelter at any given time to prevent looting of school equipment.

She said that over the next two-and-a-half hours she heard 14 explosions. Two munitions hit the school cafeteria. The swimming pool and the electrical sub-station on school property were also each struck twice. A fire erupted above the cafeteria and assembly hall, which firefighters rapidly extinguished. No one sheltering in the basement at that time was hurt.⁷²

On March 12 and 15 there were additional attacks that damaged the school, which Shelypets later learned were from cluster sub-munitions. During the March 12 attack, she heard a whistle before a munition hit a nearby office building. Fragments struck the facade of the school and the electrical sub-station. Of the March 15 attack she said:

I saw it when it happened. It looked like glowing objects were falling from the sky and spinning on the ground. It was a complete nightmare, and nonstop, and it was the last straw for many people who were still sheltering in the basement. Those who could, left then. ... I still don't understand, why did it happen, why bomb us, our children, older people?⁷³

After each of the three attacks, more people left the basement shelter, fearing for their safety, Shelypets said.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Shelypets, July 6, 2022.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Shelypets, July 6, 2022.

Shelypets said that one of the school's students, a 6th grader, was killed when her family tried to flee Chernihiv and that another student was wounded, also during evacuation. A teacher who taught first grade was wounded by fragments. None of these casualties occurred on the school's premises.

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in July 2022 and documented impact sites with splatter patterns consistent with cluster munitions.⁷⁴

At the school, 550 windows were shattered, and 53 radiators, 27 computers, and 15 laptops were destroyed.⁷⁵

In October, Shelypets said that they began replacing all of the windows, the roof, and the radiators using municipal funds.

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, 1,550 students were enrolled at the school, along with 109 teachers. Children from the first, second, and fifth grades attended another school, School Number 1, where they studied in an afternoon shift. All the other grades switched to distance learning.⁷⁶

As of April 2023, the school building was still being renovated in preparation for reopening by September 2023.⁷⁷

Chernihiv School Number 20

On the evening of March 6, 2022, Russian attacks struck Chernihiv School Number 20 four times, damaging the roof, several classrooms, and staff offices, and shattering windows on the ground floor, according to the school's deputy director, Tetiana Veremienko.⁷⁸

Veremienko said that there were no Ukrainian military forces or materiel near the school at the time of the attack. Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in July 2022 and documented fragmentation splatter patterns consistent with cluster munitions on the school

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 19, July 2022. Chernihiv, July 6, 2022

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Liudmila Shelypets, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Liudmila Shelypets, Chernihiv, October 26, 2022.z

⁷⁷ Official Web Portal of the Chernihiv City Council, "School #19 is preparing to work offline. How is the restoration of the facility going?" accessed May 24, 2023, https://chernigiv-rada.gov.ua/news/id-155430/?fbclid=IwAR1JsSnYZ73nP29_oTvrj7HhzqKxzD1hYjblwqUP1pU_aHoifHdSanC_CQ

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana Veremyenko, deputy director, School Number 20, July 6, 2022, and follow-up telephone interview, October 26, 2022.

grounds and on the building's façade and interior walls. They also documented a hole in the roof of the gymnasium and blown out windows throughout the school building.⁷⁹

As of October 2022, reconstruction was underway to repair the roof and interior. The damaged windows were being replaced, the basement converted into a bomb shelter, and the classrooms renovated and furnished. The school's 923 students were switched to distance learning due to the renovations and the security situation, with continuing Russian military attacks on the city.⁸⁰ Between October 2022 and March 2023, students were able to attend classes at School Number 3 until School Number 20 reopened to admit students in March. As of March 6, the second and third floor of the school were still closed for renovations, but classrooms were opened on the ground floor for 250 children from grades 1 to 4.⁸¹ Within a couple of weeks the school fully reopened.⁸²



The damaged gymnasium of School No. 20 in Chernihiv, Ukraine, July 6, 2022. Russian attacks struck Chernihiv School No. 20 four times on March 6, 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 20, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana Veremienko, July 6, 2022, and telephone interview, October 26, 2022.

⁸¹ Chernihiv Secondary School #20 Facebook group, Nataliya Malets, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/364330917947296/posts/923663775347338/> (accessed May 24, 2023)

⁸² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

In May 2023, the Chernihiv city council reported that they had received funding from the municipality and Ukrainian and international organizations to complete the school's renovation.⁸³

Schools 18 and 21

Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion began, local Territorial Defense Forces established their headquarters at Chernihiv School Number 18, making the school a military target. At that time, the school was also being used as a distribution center for food and other aid, putting civilians at unnecessary risk. On March 3, a Russian aerial bomb severely damaged one corner of the school. A witness said that least 150 people were at the school when it was hit, several of them Ukrainian military personnel including from the Territorial Defense Forces.⁸⁴ Local officials said that 2 civilians were killed and 14 were wounded in the attack.⁸⁵

Around the same time, a Russian aircraft dropped a bomb that struck School 21, 250 meters away, destroying much of the building. A high school student said that he was in the yard of his home, about 100 meters from the school, when he "heard a whistle, and then a big explosion."⁸⁶ At the time of the attack, about 200 civilians were sheltering in School Number 21's basement. Territorial Defense Forces had set up a military post with sandbags in front of the school and were also sleeping in the school. The strike killed three civilians who were on the ground floor, the first floor, and in the yard at the time of the attack; 19 other civilians were wounded.⁸⁷

⁸³ Vasyl Bilogura's Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/vasyl.bilogura/posts/pfbido2GYgceSsLPiKqdk6byTFBx1fq7y3A5e6eTAg357Uw5Kx4FiCCA4EM76C8tL1xwrt3l> (accessed May 24, 2023); Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witness [name withheld], Chernihiv, April 19, 2022.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Russian Strikes Killed Scores of Civilians in Chernihiv," June 10, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/10/ukraine-russian-strikes-killed-scores-civilians-chernihiv>. Also see, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," October 18, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/A-77-533-AUV-EN.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Russian Strikes Killed Scores of Civilians in Chernihiv," June 10, 2022.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Russian Strikes Killed Scores of Civilians in Chernihiv," June 10, 2022. See also, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," October 18, 2022.

Human Rights Watch researchers viewed the damage to the schools on April 19 and 20, 2022. The impact craters and scale of blast damage to structures indicate the use of a large air-delivered blast weapon totaling 250 kilograms or greater in weight.⁸⁸

On June 30, 2022, the city council decided to close Schools Number 18 and 21 because of the damage inflicted by the attacks, but future renovations may be made.⁸⁹

School Number 13's deputy director said that the school accepted a number of students and teachers from Schools Number 18 and School Number 21 for the 2022-23 academic year. Schools Number 14, 15, and 34, and Lyceum Number 32 also accepted students from both destroyed schools.⁹⁰

Chernihivska Region

Nizhyn School Number 17 and Zirochka Kindergarten

Russian forces surrounded and shelled the town of Nizhyn for about five weeks from the end of February through April 4, 2022, when the Ukrainian military repelled their advance.

Nizhyn is home to a large Ukrainian military unit, according to Valentina Hradobyyk, head of the Nizhyn city administration's educational department. School Number 17, where 347 children had been enrolled in grades 1 to 9 before the 2022 invasion, is situated a few hundred meters from the base.

Hundreds of civilians at a time also used the school as a bomb shelter, until Russian forces shelled the vicinity of the school four times, on March 10, 19, 29, and 31, with Grad rockets and cluster munitions, according to the school director, Tatiana Vlasenko.⁹¹ The March 10 attack killed two men near the school; Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether they were civilians or combatants.⁹²

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch visit to Schools Number 18 and 21, Chernihiv, April 19-20, 2022.

⁸⁹ "Four educational institutions to be liquidated and school reorganized in Chernihiv," Chernihiv portal, accessed June 30, 2023, <https://www.gorod.cn.ua/news/gorod-i-region/138040-u-chnigovi-likviduyut-chotiri-zakladi-osviti-i-reorganizaciyut-shkolu.html>

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Vasyl Bilogura, Chernihiv, June 19, 2023.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tatiana Vlasenko, director, School Number 17, July 5, 2022.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with staff member, name withheld, School Number 17, July 5, 2022.

During a visit to the school in July 2022, Human Rights Watch researchers documented a large crater, approximately five-by-two meters, on the school’s football field. A remnant of a munition had stuck out of the crater until Ukrainian forces removed it in mid-April, according to Vlasenko.⁹³ Researchers also documented blast patterns consistent with the impact of cluster munitions near the front entrance to the school building. The strike hitting the football field also resulted in damage to 90 percent of the windows and all of the doors of the “Zirochka” kindergarten, located behind the school.⁹⁴

Vlasenko said that School Number 17 had been used as a shelter for civilians for several weeks starting from the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion:

When everything started, on February 24, local residents sheltered in the school basement. There were anywhere from 150 to 300 adults and children in the basement. Some nights up to 400 people sheltered here. They started to leave on March 10 [after the school was first struck].⁹⁵

The nearby military base was hit during the fighting, damaging the base’s kitchen. At the time of Human Rights Watch’s visit, the school kitchen was being used to prepare food for those stationed at the base until the base’s kitchen was repaired.⁹⁶ Using the school facilities for this purpose may have compromised the civilian status of the school because they are being used in a manner that makes an effective contribution to military action.

The school reopened in September 2022 following renovations, including to the bomb shelter. Across Nizhyn, 15 of 17 schools and 4 kindergartens reopened in September, with children and teachers from closed schools transferring to those that had opened. As of early October, 2022, 340 children were attending the school when Russian shelling across Ukraine intensified, causing the school to switch to distance learning.⁹⁷

⁹³ Human Rights Watch visit to Nizhyn School Number 17, July 5, 2022.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch visit to Nizhyn School Number 17, July 5, 2022, and Human Rights Watch interview with Valentina Hradobyk, head, Nizhyn City Administration Education Department, Nizhyn, July 5, 2022.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tatiana Vlasenko, July 5, 2022.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Valentina Hradobyk, head, Nizhyn City Administration Education Department, Nizhyn, July 5, 2022.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Valentina Hradobyk, October 27, 2022.



The town school in Novyi Bykiv, Chernihivska region, Ukraine, June 25, 2022. Russian forces encamped in the school for two weeks from late February to early March 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch.

Novyi Bykiv School and Kindergarten

Novyi Bykiv, a town with a pre-2022 population of 2,000 in the Chernihivska region, is located on a major east-west highway leading to Kyiv, 90 kilometers to the east.

Russian forces entered Novyi Bykiv on February 27 and occupied it until March 31. For the first two weeks, they encamped in the school and kindergarten and, according to residents, looted the school and left it in shambles. A local community leader who helped clean up the school after Russian forces left, said:

While [the Russians] lived in the school, they destroyed something in almost every classroom: 80 percent of all the furniture was destroyed or damaged. The school had a large interactive whiteboard, which they shot at. They took computers, equipment, projectors. They looted stuff from

nearby houses, like carpets, beds, and mattresses, and used them at the school.

When they left, there was garbage and food remnants everywhere. They left munition boxes and empty ration boxes. The mess was horrendous. Teachers, children, residents came together to help clean. It took us three days. We had to shovel broken glass, broken furniture, and garbage out of the windows, filling several trucks and tractors.⁹⁸

Human Rights Watch researchers visiting the school found many windows blown out, broken internal doors, and holes on internal walls. Interior and exterior walls were visibly damaged by bullet holes and fragmentation.⁹⁹



The town kindergarten in Novyi Bykiv, Chernihivska region, Ukraine, June 25, 2022. Russian forces encamped in the kindergarten for two weeks from late February to early March 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with resident, name withheld, Novyi Bykiv, June 25, 2022.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to Novyi Bykiv School and Kindergarten, June 25, 2022.

The community leader said that Russian forces established a headquarters in the basement of the kindergarten, which 68 children attended with 30 staff before the war. He saw Russian armored personnel carriers and other military equipment parked near the kindergarten and school. The Russian forces detained at least three people overnight on February 27-28 in the preschool basement and questioned one of them, a 64-year-old man, the next day in the school.¹⁰⁰

Ukrainian forces attacked Russian forces occupying the kindergarten sometime between March 20 and 31, he said.¹⁰¹

Human Rights Watch researchers documented extensive damage to the kindergarten. Many windows were blown out, significant parts of the roof were missing, and part of the roof had caved into a second-floor classroom. There was damage to the entryway, façade, and internal and external walls.¹⁰² In classrooms, toy blocks, puzzles, dolls, and children's drawings were strewn with debris, glass, and building rubble. In the playground near one of the school entrances, Russian soldiers had dug a trench and fortified it with sandbags.

The community leader said that the damage to the nursery school was so significant, it would likely not be renovated.¹⁰³

Dorohynka School

Russian forces occupied Dorohynka, a village of 800 people, from late February 2022 until the end of March 2022. On March 30 or 31, Russian soldiers fired weapons directly at Dorohynka's school as they withdrew from the village, according to school officials. The attacks blew out 35 windows, started a fire in a laboratory on the ground floor, and damaged several classrooms. The administrative manager and former students arrived at the school to put out the fire.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ "Ukraine: Executions, Torture During Russian Occupation," Human Rights Watch, May 18, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/18/ukraine-executions-torture-during-russian-occupation>.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with resident, name withheld, Novyi Bykiv, June 25, 2022.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch visit to Novyi Bykiv school, June 25, 2022.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with resident, name withheld, Novyi Bykiv, June 25, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Raisa Degtiarenko, director, and Nikolay Vasiliovich, administrative manager, Dorohynka School, Dorohynka, July 5, 2022.

“We were told that it [the munition] was fired from a grenade launcher or from an armored personnel carrier,” said the school’s director, Raisa Degtiarenko. She believes that the attack may have been in retaliation for losses suffered by Russian forces as they withdrew. She said the Russians reported that Ukrainian forces had also shot down a Russian drone near the school.¹⁰⁵

The school reopened in September 2022 for 114 schoolchildren and 25 teachers, but there were no school buses to bring children to school. At the time, children whose parents could bring them to school were attending in the morning, until 1:10 p.m. Students lacking transportation were studying online in the afternoon. As of October 2022, the school had not been renovated and the windows were still covered in plastic. They said they were awaiting promised donor support.¹⁰⁶

Krupychpole school

Krupychpole is a small village about 200 kilometers east of Kyiv. On March 31, 2022, as Russian forces withdrew from the territory, a Russian armored personnel carrier fired at the village school, said the school’s director.¹⁰⁷ Bullets went through the wooden wall and started a fire. The school’s bus driver, who was nearby, ran to the school and quickly put out the fire.

The school, with 54 students and 12 teachers, was scheduled to reopen in September 2022.¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch visited the school in July 2022 and observed the damage from the fire. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether Ukrainian forces were deployed in or near the school at the time of the attack.

Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske Lyceum

Russian forces occupied Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske, a village of about 3,000 people, from February 28, 2022 through March 2022. Prior to the full-scale invasion, around 400

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Raisa Degtiarenko, October 25, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Yuriy Kot, director, Krupychpole School, July 5, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Yuriy Kot, Krupychpole, July 5, 2022.

students attended the settlement's lyceum.¹⁰⁹

During their occupation of the settlement/town, Russian forces parked armored vehicles next to the school, where about 130 civilians sought shelter in the basement beginning in late February. The Russian forces did not, to the extent feasible, remove civilians under their control from the vicinity of an objective. They neither urged civilians to leave nor facilitated evacuations.

On March 4, apparent Ukrainian forces attacked the Russian troops and damaged the lyceum building, killing one woman who worked at the school. At that point, the civilians evacuated the school basement.

Human Rights Watch researchers tried to visit the school in July 2022, but Ukrainian soldiers were using the school at the time.

As of May 2023, the building of the lyceum was undergoing renovations funded by an international foundation.¹¹⁰

Yahidne

In late February 2022, Russian forces entered Yahidne village, 15 kilometers south of Chernihiv city. They remained until Ukrainian forces briefly retook the village on March 1. Russian forces again seized Yahidne on March 4, and remained there until March 31.¹¹¹ On March 4, Russian forces told residents that they needed to shelter in the local school “for their own safety,” many villagers said. Some villagers refused and were allowed to remain in their homes because they were sick or caring for someone. Human Rights Watch’s May 2022 report documented Russian forces’ encampment at the village school and their unlawful detention of over 350 people in the school basement in cramped, unsanitary

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, T:me Chernihiv, “They were hit by a rocket: the lyceum in Mykhailo-Kotsiubinske miraculously did not become a mass grave for 100 adults and children,” June 17, 2022, <https://cntime.cn.ua/vdarili-raketoyu-licej-u-mihajlo-kocyubinskomu-div-article/> (accessed June 2, 2023).

¹¹⁰ Update from the Ministry of Education and Science, posted on Facebook on May 31, 2023. [https://www.facebook.com/100066894640084/posts/pfbidouQUfjP2jSFhjtsvjCVcW8AwTWCQbdHtfhewcXaTqxdCNuTQtk3zMMMySeaVgzpf4l/?\(accessed June 2, 2023\).](https://www.facebook.com/100066894640084/posts/pfbidouQUfjP2jSFhjtsvjCVcW8AwTWCQbdHtfhewcXaTqxdCNuTQtk3zMMMySeaVgzpf4l/?(accessed June 2, 2023).)

¹¹¹ This section is drawn from *Ukraine: Executions, Torture During Russian Occupation*, Human Rights Watch, May 18, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/18/ukraine-executions-torture-during-russian-occupation>.

conditions until Russian forces left the area on March 31.¹¹²

Russian forces severely limited people's ability to leave the basement, even for brief periods. During this period, Russian soldiers used the school as a military base and deployed military vehicles around the school building in dugouts and pits. A woman who was in the basement with her 8-year-old son said that she saw many soldiers at the school and numerous armored vehicles.

A March 10 satellite image shows several dozen armored and military support vehicles in the schoolyard and large vehicle tracks throughout the village, with a higher concentration at the school building. Apparent impact craters are also visible in the village, the closest about 60 meters northeast of the school. When Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in April 2022, they saw trenches and dugouts, wheeled and tracked armored military vehicles that had been left behind, and at least 21 shipping boxes of unguided 152mm artillery projectiles and one shipping box for a 9M113 Konkurs anti-tank guided missile.¹¹³

In a satellite image from March 21, the military vehicles at the school and adjacent areas are no longer visible but the destruction in the village had increased significantly, including of buildings between 50 and 100 meters from the school. The image shows damage on the roof and the northeastern facade of the school, consistent with damage researchers observed when they visited. More damage to buildings and additional craters, presumably by Ukrainian attacks, is visible in a satellite image from March 23.¹¹⁴

Human Rights Watch interviewed 13 civilians detained in the school basement, which consisted of two large rooms and six smaller rooms.¹¹⁵ They said that during the first few days, Russian soldiers did not open the door at all, and subsequently opened it no more than once a day, allowing people to leave irregularly to use the outdoor toilet and to cook over outdoor fires. At times they permitted some detainees to go home to bring food back to the basement. They described the suffocating lack of air, the absence of space to move around or lie down and having to use buckets for toilets. Many fell ill. Eight older people

¹¹² Human Rights Watch, *Ukraine: Executions, Torture During Russian Occupation*.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Ukraine: Executions, Torture During Russian Occupation*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

died during their detention, and two others died at home, after Russian soldiers allowed them to leave because of their rapidly deteriorating health condition.¹¹⁶

Kharkiv City

More than 450 civilians were killed or injured in the first 11 days of the war in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, as a result of Russian airstrikes and artillery shelling. In the ensuing months, Russian forces repeatedly attacked Kharkiv's residential areas using heavy explosive weapons.¹¹⁷

In the densely populated Kyivskiy district of Kharkiv, with a pre-war population of 200,000, 62 out of the district's 63 pre-primary, primary, and secondary educational facilities, as well as art and music centers for children and youth, sustained damage as a result of Russian and some Ukrainian attacks, according to the head of the district administration, Nelli Kazanzhieva.¹¹⁸ This figure includes 23 schools, 29 kindergartens, and other buildings. One school, Number 134, was totally destroyed, one was partially destroyed, 11 schools and 8 kindergartens were heavily damaged but repairable, and the remainder were damaged enough to require repairs.¹¹⁹

In addition to the attacks on the three schools in Kharkiv described below, Human Rights Watch in a March 2022 report documented Russian attacks on six other schools in the city, including School Numbers 11, 75, 118, 128, 150 and 158, as well as a boarding school for children who are blind.¹²⁰

With Russian attacks on the region continuing even after the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Kharkivska region, children had difficulty returning to those schools that were

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Russian Attacks in Kharkiv, Human Rights Watch report, August 16, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/16/ukraine-unlawful-russian-attacks-kharkiv>.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nelli Kazanzhieva, Kyivskiy district administration head, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022. All data in this paragraph is attributable to Kazanzhieva.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nelli Kazanzhieva, June 27, 2022. All data in this paragraph is attributable to Kazanzhieva.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Deadly Attacks Kill, Injure Civilians, Destroy Homes," March 18, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/18/ukraine-deadly-attacks-kill-injure-civilians-destroy-homes>.

able to function. “In these circumstances, it’s hard to imagine kids going to school, when you don’t know what, when, and where there will be a strike,” said Kazanzhieva.¹²¹

The head of the Education Department of Kharkivska region, Oleksiy Litvinov, told Human Rights Watch in November 2022 that for security reasons, the regional military administration decided to maintain remote learning in all of the region’s education facilities until the end of hostilities. “Of course we understand that kids are not being fully covered, as concerns their education” Litvinov said. “Not because we don’t want to. But because of the objective difficulties and gaps.”¹²²

School Number 62

School Number 62 specialized in teaching English and had 1,121 students as of February 24, 2022, according to the school director, Oleksandr Hryanyk. The school consisted of three buildings: the primary school, the secondary school, and the language and art building where a healthcare facility was located.

The school was subjected to repeated Russian attacks in February, March, and April 2022. On February 27, an aerial attack struck the language and art building, damaging windows, window frames, and some equipment.¹²³

Hryanyk described attacks using apparent cluster munitions on the primary and secondary school buildings:

On the night of April 7 to 8, Russian artillery fire and aerial bombardment struck [these] two ... school buildings. There were five bombs that came down on parachutes. We found the parachutes later. There are five craters from the bombs: four very close to the [secondary school building] and one direct hit to [it]. There were also two artillery strikes, one on the Russian language classroom. Near the primary school, there were cluster munition

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nelli Kazanzhieva, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022. All data in this paragraph is attributable to Kazanzhieva.

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Civil Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksander Hryanyk, director, School Number 62, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

remnants, about 1 to 1.5 meters away from the school. The explosions blew out the windows.¹²⁴

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in June 2022. The secondary school entrance windows were blown out and its walls were damaged, and the severely damaged entryway was littered with broken glass and building debris. On the third floor, part of the roof had caved in on a classroom, landing on desks. Large holes perforated the walls on the ground and third floors. There were three large craters at the school's sport stadium.¹²⁵



School No. 62, Kharkiv, Ukraine, June 27, 2022. The school was subjected to repeated Russian attacks in February, March, and April 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksander Hryanyk, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 62, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

Hryanyk described to Human Rights Watch the personal impact of the attacks on the school:

We are in the lobby, but it's not just a lobby. School assemblies, performances, and concerts happened here. Life was in full swing. This is all that's left. You can see the shoes children would have changed into when they came to school on February 24. The shoes are still waiting for the children here. I don't have the heart to talk about this. The enemy has brought so much pain.¹²⁶

Hryanyk said he hoped the school could open in September 2022, with children studying in two shifts in the building with the least damage. From March through the end of the school year on June 1, 2022, classes were held online, although the district had little to no communication and electricity until early May, 2022.¹²⁷

School Number 134

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, School Number 134 had enrolled 649 students and employed 55 teachers. Russian forces seized the school on February 27 for about 12 hours. The school building was entirely destroyed after Ukrainian forces attacked the Russian forces deployed in the building, which involved fighting on school property.¹²⁸

Human Rights Watch researchers visiting Kharkiv in June 2022 saw that the building's roof and many walls had completely collapsed, all of the windows were broken, and at least part of the school was damaged by fire.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksander Hryanyk, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksander Hryanyk, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nelli Kazanzhieva, June 27, 2022. See also Hromadske, "Fighting for the School. How Elite Russian Special Forces Were Destroyed in Kharkiv" June 15, 2022, <https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/boj-za-shkolu-kak-v-harkove-unichtozhili-elitnyj-rossijskij-specnaz> (accessed August 10, 2023) and "27.02.2022 battle near school 14 in Kharkiv. The shameful death of Russian special forces," MP4, March 28, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVzORvpYalU> (accessed October 2, 2023).

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to Kharkiv School Number 134, June 27, 2022.

School Number 17

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, Kharkiv School Number 17, which specialized in teaching foreign languages, had 1,300 students.¹³⁰ The school was struck by munitions on March 2 and 27, 2022. It was also directly struck by a missile on the night of June 1, which started a large fire, said the school's director, Iryna Kaseko. The school caretaker sustained severe fragmentation wounds, and one woman who had left the shelter in the school basement was killed.¹³¹

During a visit to the school in late June 2022, Human Rights Watch researchers observed a large impact crater in the middle of the school and a wing of the building entirely collapsed and in ruins. Windows were shattered throughout the parts of the school that remained standing.¹³²

Kharkivska Region

Izium

Russian forces occupied Izium from mid-March, taking full control of the city between mid-March and early April, until September 12, 2022 when they withdrew from the city and its environs.

Russian forces attacked Ukrainian forces that were using three schools. They encamped in nine schools or kindergartens, three of which came under attack by Ukrainian forces. In several instances, Russian and Ukrainian forces deployed in the same school at different times.

Human Rights Watch visited all of the nine schools in Izium and four kindergartens there in late September and early October 2022, and visited one school, School Number 11, again in November 2022.

All but one of the schools visited had suffered extensive damage. Eight of them did not reopen after the withdrawal of Russian forces. The head of the teachers' union in Izium

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna Kaseko, director, School Number 17, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna Kaseko, director, School Number 17, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

¹³² Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 17, Kharkiv, June 27, 2022.

said in May 2023 that authorities were not planning to renovate damaged schools until hostilities ended, as Iziium remained an active hostility zone.¹³³

School Number 2

Local residents said Russian soldiers occupied School Number 2 by late May 2022.¹³⁴ One reported that they used the school as a medical facility.¹³⁵ Ukrainian forces attacked Russian forces deployed in the building in June, resulting in a large fire and many explosions, apparently caused by ammunition stored in the school.¹³⁶

A video shared on Instagram on June 25, 2022, which Human Rights Watch verified, shows damage to the school, with windows blown out, and on fire. In the school courtyard are numerous Russian military vehicles, including armored vehicles, large transportation trucks, and what appear to be private vehicles requisitioned for military use with “Z”s painted on them. Men can be heard speaking in Russian, discussing whether a particular vehicle will function. A man in military uniform with combat gear is visible in the school courtyard.¹³⁷ Local residents said that Russian forces had told them to leave the area, but they did not do so. “They told us to leave at some point, but we refused,” said a resident. “We can’t leave our homes, and anyway, where would we go?”¹³⁸

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the heavily damaged school in September 2022 and saw sandbags stacked up on the windowsills, military food containers, weapons boxes and munitions boxes, and pits dug in the schoolyard for military vehicles. There was evidence of a fire and heavy destruction to the school’s windows, the façade, and roof.¹³⁹

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana Savchenko, teacher of mathematics in Iziium Lyceum No 3, head of Iziium’s teachers’ union, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Olexandr, Iziium, September 23, 2022, and Tatiana, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana Savchenko, November 3, 2022.

¹³⁶ https://www.instagram.com/p/CfPgDJurtWTJVFJSSHirMyo-4NKLyL_yC9Fsp8o/ and Human Rights Watch interview with Olexandr, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch identified that the video first appeared online on June 25, 2022, and verified that the video was recorded in the yard of School Number 2, likely in June 2022. A satellite image from May 30, 2022 shows the school intact, and includes presence of military vehicles similar to those seen in the video. An image from July 3, 2022, shows the school destroyed and the vehicles cleared away. Military vehicles were visible on satellite imagery at the school since March 20.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Olexandr, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to Iziium School Number 2, September 23, 2022.

Lyceum Number 3

A mathematics teacher at Lyceum Number 3 said that various groups of Russian soldiers had been stationed at the lyceum over the course of the 6-months occupation of Iziium. During that time, the school's third and fourth floors were damaged by apparent Ukrainian attacks.

Human Rights Watch visited the school in September 2022 and observed damage to the roof of the building consistent with high-explosive fragmentation submunitions delivered by cluster munitions. Damage to the school's gymnasium was consistent with the kinetic effects of a large projectile striking the roof. One nearby resident said that the attack happened in the spring but that Russian forces subsequently attempted to repair the building.¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch observed minimal repair work done to the school in areas that had been damaged.

The teacher said that as of November 2022, the school had 700 students, but were trying to conduct online classes only in shifts due to blackouts. The school's online platform attracted students from different parts of Ukraine, she said.¹⁴¹

Schools Number 4 and Number 1

In early March 2022, Ukrainian soldiers and Territorial Defense Force (TDF) members used School Number 4 and School Number 1, about 500 meters apart, to defend the bridges across the Siverskiy Donets river from advancing Russian troops.

A TDF member outside of School Number 1 told Human Rights Watch that Ukrainian troops had encamped in the school while defending the bridge. He said that on March 7 he was 100 meters away from the school, near one of the bridges, when Russian attacks struck the school, causing heavy damage.¹⁴² Human Rights Watch visited the school in September 2022 and saw that only the shell of the building remained: the roof and all of the windows had been destroyed and there was evidence of a fire in much of the school.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, September 21, 2022.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana Savchenko, teacher of mathematics in Iziium Lyceum No 3, head of Iziium's teachers' union, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Mykola, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 1, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

Another TDF member said that three TDF members were in the basement of School Number 4 when it was hit by two airstrikes.¹⁴⁴ A local resident who witnessed the attack said he had seen TDF forces using the school as a base from which to prevent Russian forces from using the bridge to cross from the left bank to the right bank of the river. Sometime in early March, he saw a Russian airplane arrive from the northwest, fly over the school, loop around to circle back, and bomb the school, destroying it.¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch visited the school and confirmed that parts of the school were demolished and in other parts only walls remained.¹⁴⁶

School Number 5

Beginning on February 27, 2022, approximately 200 people, including many children, sheltered in the basement of Iziium School Number 5. On March 10, as Russian forces were advancing on the area, the school was struck twice, first at 10 p.m. on the side of the building where the basement was located, and then about two hours later on the other side of the building, hitting both the exterior wall and roof. No one was injured. Valentina, 64, a local resident who was in the basement, said:

We heard planes and explosions and so I knew it was an airstrike. We just started praying as we heard the glass shattering from the first explosion. We didn't leave the building that night. We only went outside the next day, but we ended up living in the building for another four months.¹⁴⁷

The night of the strike, Nina, 72, and Olga, 66, were in the basement together with their grandchildren, the youngest of whom was 6-years-old. They said that mainly women and children were sheltering in the basement and there were no military personnel in the building or outside.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with member of Territorial Defense Forces, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Olexandr, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 4, Iziium, September 23, 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Valentina, Iziium, September 25, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nina and Olga, Iziium, September 25, 2022.

Human Rights Watch researchers who visited the school saw that a large section at one end the school was in ruins and on the opposite side there was a hole in the second floor and damage to the surrounding façade and windows.¹⁴⁹

Lyceum Number 6 and Kindergarten Number 10

Lyceum Number 6, with a pre-2022 enrollment of more than 700.¹⁵⁰ Kindergarten Number 10 consists of two buildings within 150 meters from Lyceum Number 6.

Two local residents said that Russian and Russia-backed forces occupied the Lyceum in April 2022 and parked large military vehicles there.¹⁵¹ One woman said that Russian forces distributed humanitarian aid to local residents from the school.¹⁵² The soldiers vacated the lyceum building in July 2022 because occupation authorities planned to prepare the building for the school year.¹⁵³

Two men separately told Human Rights Watch that Russian forces detained them in Lyceum Number 6 in a storage closet and beat them.¹⁵⁴

Ukrainian Emergency Service workers said that after the Russian forces withdrew from the area, they had cleared landmines and unexploded ordnance from around the school. Human Rights Watch researchers visited the lyceum in September 2022 and found minor damage to the school but observed the remnants of three PFM-1 anti-personnel landmines that had detonated and a fourth that appeared undetonated in a patch of grass next to the school.¹⁵⁵

Attacks also damaged Iziium Kindergarten Number 10. A resident believed that the Russian military was not using the kindergarten but said that an attack in early March 2022

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 5, Iziium, September 25, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetyana Savchenko, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with a man and a woman who declined to identify themselves, Iziium, September 21, 2022, and with Roman, Iziium, September 22, 2022.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with woman who declined to identify herself, Iziium, September 21, 2022.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interviews with a man and a woman who declined to identify themselves, Iziium, September 21, 2022, and with Roman, Iziium, September 22, 2022.

¹⁵⁴ For documentation on the torture of these two men, see “Ukraine: Russian Forces Tortured Iziium Detainees,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 18, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees>.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 6, Iziium, September 22, 2022.

damaged one of the kindergarten buildings. A separate attack in March damaged the kindergarten's second building, starting a fire that spread to the first building.¹⁵⁶

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the kindergarten in October 2022 and documented extensive damage, including to much of the roof, many windows missing, and only the walls remaining in part of the building.¹⁵⁷

School Number 10

The director of Iziium School Number 10, Irina Hryhorivna, said that on February 28, 2022, Russian forces shelled the railway tracks and a bridge over the tracks about 50 meters from the school, blowing out all the school's windows and damaging the roof. People who had been sheltering in the building left due to the damage. Russian forces occupied the school in March and dug trenches and parked military vehicles in the yard. When they withdrew from the school in late August or early September, they looted the school furniture and heating system, Irina Hryhorivna said.¹⁵⁸

School Number 11 and Kindergarten Number 17

School 11 in Iziium, with a pre-2022 enrollment of 600, is less than 100 meters from Kindergarten Number 17.

Residents living near School Number 11 said Ukrainian Territorial Defense Force members encamped in the school from February 24 until Russians troops advanced on the city in early March 2022. A local resident said that after heavy shelling in the area during the first days of March, he and others started using the school basement as a shelter, with 50 to 100 people there at any given time. Russian soldiers arrived later that week and took over the school.¹⁵⁹ The local resident said:

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Olexandr, Iziium, October 7, 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch visit to Kindergarten Number 10, Iziium, October 7, 2022.

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Irina Hryhorivna, director, School Number 10, Iziium, October 8, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with man living near School Number 11, [name withheld], Iziium, September 26, 2022; Human Rights Watch group interview with three residents living near School Number 11 and Kindergarten Number 19, September 26, 2022; Human Rights Watch interview with "Andrii," September 22, 2022 and October 6, 2022; and Human Rights Watch interview with resident living near Kindergarten Number 11, Iziium, October 6, 2022.

Some [Russian] soldiers came to the basement door and started yelling for everyone to get out. They threatened to throw grenades down into the basement if we didn't get out. We all ran. We left everything we brought with us down there, including our medicines.¹⁶⁰

The local resident said that Russian forces dug trenches and parked military vehicles in the schoolyard as well as in the yard of Kindergarten Number 17.¹⁶¹ Other residents who lived near the kindergarten confirmed that Russian forces used it and dug trenches in the yard for military equipment.¹⁶²

Several residents said that Russian forces were encamped in School Number 11 and the kindergarten.¹⁶³ A woman who was a security guard at School Number 11 said Russian forces occupied the school and kindergarten until July, when Russian occupation authorities ordered her and 19 others to clean up the school to prepare it for the school year. She said:

When they first occupied it, they torched part of the school – physically burned it. Perhaps it was a ‘Molotov cocktail’ [gasoline bomb] in the kitchen. They brought a lot of furniture when they moved in. Maybe it was looted office furniture- sofas, chairs.

We were recruited to clean up their mess. I was cleaning up for them [in the school] and also in the kindergarten. They left all sorts of things behind: food, mostly clothing, boots, sneakers. There were pits for military vehicles, like tanks, dug into the ground of the schoolyard. Many vehicles. And after they left, we had to fill the pits in.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with man [name withheld], Iziium, September 26, 2022.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with man [name withheld], Iziium, September 26, 2022.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with a local resident [name withheld], September 26 and October 6, 2022 and his neighbour, Iziium, October 6, 2022.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interviews, Iziium, September 26 and October 6, 2022.

Everything was covered in soot because of the Molotov cocktail incident. We painted the walls ourselves, using our own paints and supplies, pooling our resources. Now it's clean. We like it.¹⁶⁴

Residents also reported that when Ukrainian forces arrived in Iziium on September 10 after the Russian withdrawal, Ukrainian soldiers stayed in the school. On September 26, a Ukrainian soldier standing outside of the school told Human Rights Watch that he was based there.¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch observed six soldiers going in and out of the school and five military vehicles parked at the school as well as three military vehicles at the kindergarten on September 20.¹⁶⁶ A local resident said that Ukrainian soldiers were using the kindergarten.¹⁶⁷ On October 6, Human Rights Watch observed two military vehicles outside of the kindergarten and several outside of the school.

The school security guard said in November 2022 that Ukrainian forces had remained in the school for several weeks and conducted demining, and that she had returned to her job as a day guard in mid-October.¹⁶⁸

School Number 12 and Kindergartens Number 2 and Number 14

Four Iziium residents said Russian forces occupied the two main buildings of School Number 12 (the renamed School Number 8) and Kindergartens Number 2 and Number 14 from early March through July 2022.¹⁶⁹ Soldiers dug 10 large trenches for vehicles and parked many military vehicles at the school, including armored vehicles with large cannons.¹⁷⁰ Russian soldiers used the School Number 12 buildings as a security office and as a military base, and encamped soldiers in the two kindergartens directly opposite the school.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna, School Number 11, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ukrainian soldier [no name given], Iziium, September 26, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 11, Iziium, September 26, 2022.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch visit to School Number 11, Iziium, September 26, 2022, and interview with "Andrii," September 22, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna, School Number 11, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Volodymyr, with Valentina, with Alexander, and with Pavel, Iziium, September 20, 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Pavel, Iziium, September 20, 2022.

¹⁷¹ Kindergarten Number 2 and Kindergarten Number 14. Human Rights Watch interview with Olexandr, Iziium, September 20, 2022.

One man said Russian forces held him in School Number 12 in April, where they threatened and beat him.¹⁷²

A kindergarten teacher said Russian forces had a checkpoint on the road between the school and the kindergartens. She said that when teachers returned to the kindergartens in late July 2022 to clean them and get them ready for classes, the Russian forces continued to occupy the school.¹⁷³ Ukrainian forces attacked the area in early August, striking the two school buildings.¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch researchers visited the school in October and saw extensive damage caused by the attacks.

Borova

Russian forces entered Borova, a village nearly 40 kilometers northeast of Iziium, on April 13, 2022, and occupied School Number 1 for more than a week, according to school staff. One teacher described the condition of the school when they were able to return to it in early October 2022, after Russian forces withdrew from the area:

They took away all the Ukrainian-language literature and wrote things on the blackboards. It was so filthy here. They wrote, “Putin is our president. Ukrainians and Russians are one people.” We came to try to save the furniture. All the computers had been opened up. They took all the hard drives. They broke a lot of monitors and locks on the doors.

There was an Iskander missile that exploded close to the school, damaging the roof. Now the school is partly ruined due to rain and humidity.¹⁷⁵

The teacher showed Human Rights Watch researchers a sniper position that Russian forces had set up in the building’s attic that commanded a wide view from the roof. He also said that Russian forces had for three days detained and tortured a teacher who had previously worked as a police officer in the frontline Donbas areas after 2014.

¹⁷² “Ukraine: Russian Forces Tortured Iziium Detainees,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 19, 2022.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Olena, Iziium, September 20, 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Pavel, and with Olena, Iziium, September 20, 2022.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with Liudmila Viktorivna, deputy director, Vasiliy Andriyovitch, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, School Number 1, Borova, November 5, 2022.

The school's deputy director, Liudmila Viktorivna, said:

We had a television, an interactive board, and a computer in every classroom. We had well-equipped physics and chemistry labs. We had projectors in 10 rooms. When we came back, there was nothing left. They burned some of the Ukrainian language books, took some of them, and left some.¹⁷⁶

The Russians left behind hundreds of Russian school textbooks, which Ukrainian staff gathered and placed in the gymnasium hall. There was no internet access at the school when Human Rights Watch visited in November 2022, but students with a connection could download the online school materials. Because of the reduced school capacity, each student could come to the school two designated days per week. The teachers were offering the support on their own initiative as “free consultations to help students catch up on what they missed,” Liudmila Viktorivna said.¹⁷⁷

Balakliya Schools and Nearby Village Schools

Balakliya is a town of about 28,000 people about 90 kilometers southeast of Kharkiv. It was occupied by Russian forces from the early days of the war until September 8, 2022, when Ukrainian forces regained control. The head of the Balakliya Department of Education, Svitlana Shvid, and two local teachers said 4 of 19 schools in Balakliya were significantly damaged by Russian airstrikes, primarily in the early days of the war. Shvid said that Russian troops encamped in Balakliya School Number 3, maintained a field hospital in School No. 1, and used a music school as their headquarters. She also said Russian forces used schools in the nearby villages of Volokhiv Yar, Borshchivka, Verbivka, and Nova Husarivka.¹⁷⁸ Russian forces struck the Verbivskiy Lyceum as they withdrew. Shvid said that prior to the war, there were 4,200 students in Balakliya schools and, as of November, 2,840 remained. The number of kindergarteners dropped from 1,105 to 718.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Svitlana Shvid, Galina Slabko, and Inna Mandryka, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

A village school in Vasylenkove

Russian forces began their occupation of the village of Vasylenkove, population 500, on March 10, 2022.

A school staff member said that when Russian forces occupied the village, they immediately set up military headquarters in the school. Prior to the invasion, the school, which was built in 1912, provided education to 46 students in grades 1-5 and employed 12 teachers and 5 maintenance workers. Initially, about 50 to 60 Russian soldiers were deployed in the village, including in the school. By the end of April, Russian military technicians arrived and joined them. The staff member said:

They set up a checkpoint at the crossroads outside the school and at the end of the school. All of the area was mined. Mined immediately. No one was injured but someone spotted booby traps. A farmer let cows into the minefield and some were killed by explosions. We were cut off from the outside world. We couldn't drive. Two streets were taken over and the Russians took over private houses.

The Russian soldiers pillaged the town:

Ukrainian forces had to target and destroy those houses to kill [the Russian soldiers]. And they [the Russians] started looting when they came.... They took cars, took everything from houses. There was one shift of soldiers, then another, then another, five times they rotated, and each time they'd go around the village. Took meat out of stores, stole refrigerators. Sometimes they shot randomly into bushes in case anyone was there.¹⁸⁰

The staff member said that Russian soldiers started bringing ammunition to the school on March 10. On May 26, the school was hit by Ukrainian shelling. The school building caught fire and was destroyed completely when the ammunition Russian forces had stored there exploded.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with school staff member, Vasylenkove, November 6, 2022.

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the village in November 2022 and saw that the village school was completely destroyed.

The school principal said local officials suspended the school's operation. The children still registered at the school were transferred to other schools for remote classes due to constant interruptions in connectivity. The village kindergarten was not damaged by the shelling, but for security reasons, local authorities decided not to conduct in-person classes there.¹⁸¹

A teacher said her daughter, a seventh-grade student at the school, could not attend online classes because there was no stable internet connection. She said school staff were ready to rebuild the school themselves if they were provided the needed materials.

“We are ready to clean it with our own hands to reopen the school,” she said.

In July 2023, the school principal said the school's 12 teachers could begin providing lessons for 47 students from Vasylenkove.¹⁸²

Lyceum in Yakovlivka village

In late February 2022, Ukrainian forces in Yakovlivka village started using the local lyceum and council buildings as a military base and barracks. On March 2, at about 10:30 p.m., an apparent Russian attack with multiple munitions hit the village, killing 4 civilians and wounding at least 10 others.¹⁸³ The school was “lightly damaged,” according to a local resident.¹⁸⁴ As of May 2023, the school was open for distance learning.¹⁸⁵

Merefa School Number 6

Prior to February 2022, about 700 students attended Merefa School Number 6. The school switched to online education immediately following Russia's full-scale invasion.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch phone interview with school principal Yulia Petrivna Savchenko, July 31, 2023.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch, “Russian, Ukrainian Bases Endangering Civilians,” July 21, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/21/russian-ukrainian-bases-endangering-civilians>.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Alla Huts, May 26, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Yakovlivsky School of Merefyanky City Council of Kharkiv Region, http://yakovlivka.edu.kh.ua/novini_shkoli/page-number/8

Russian forces attacked Merefa, a town about 30 kilometers southwest of Kharkiv, on March 17, 2022. A munition struck the school at about 3:30 a.m., causing a fire.

A local resident said that he was about 100 meters away from the school at the time of the attack. He said a blast threw him into the air, but he was not badly injured. He called a local official saying, “There is no school anymore. A missile hit the school. Call everyone to come help.”¹⁸⁶

The strike hitting the school and ensuing fire completely destroyed it. A school official said, “The Ministry of Education sent a commission from Kyiv who worked with a team from the local council to assess the damage. They said there is no way to repair the building.”¹⁸⁷

Ukrainian emergency services reported that moments after the school was attacked, there was another Russian strike on the village of Seleksiine, just a few kilometers away, suggesting the same plane launched both attacks. The Seleksiine strike hit a cultural center where at least 300 Ukrainian soldiers were encamped, a valid military target.¹⁸⁸

However, a dozen people interviewed by Human Rights Watch said there was no Ukrainian military in or near the Merefa school building at the time when it was attacked, making that attack unlawful.

The strike on the school also damaged a kindergarten on the school grounds. School officials said the kindergarten could be used for students when the school resumed in-person classes. Children would be taught in shifts, as the kindergarten cannot hold all the schoolchildren at once.

As of May 2023, the school was continuing with online learning through the 2022-2023 school year.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Boris, School Number 6, Merefa, March 25, 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Viktoria Sokolovska, deputy head for science and methodology, and Oksana Yeroshina, deputy head of education, School Number 6, Merefa, March 25, 2022, and telephone interview with Sokolovska and Yeroshina, March 26, 2022.

¹⁸⁸ “Kharkiv Region: ‘A School and a House of Culture Were Destroyed in Merefa, There Are Wounded,’” *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/17/7332101/index.amp> (accessed August 17, 2023)

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Viktoria Sokolovska, and Oksana Yeroshina, Merefa, March 25, 2022, and telephone interview with Sokolovska and Yeroshina, March 26, 2022.

Mykolaivska Region

Snihurivka Gymnasium and School Number 1

Snihurivka is a town approximately 55 kilometers north of Kherson, in the Mykolaivska region, that Russian forces occupied from March 19 until November 10, 2022.

A teacher from School Number 1 said that Russian forces occupied the school on March 19 or 20. They departed on March 25 after nearby shelling blew out all of the windows.¹⁹⁰ Russian troops did not return after that, but according to the teacher and another resident, Russian occupying forces used the school gymnasium for administrative activities from June or July until October 2022.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tatiana, Snihurivka, November 22, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tatiana and with [name withheld], Snihurivka, November 22, 2022.

Access to Education

In response to Russia’s full-scale invasion, Ukraine’s Ministry of Education and Science on March 15, 2022 developed a “Concept Plan on the Functioning of the Education System, Research and Innovation sector of Ukraine during Martial Law and Further Reconstruction Period related to Russian Aggression.”¹⁹²

The plan outlines several anticipated impacts of the war on education, including but not limited to destruction of educational facilities; threats to the life, health, and safety of students, teachers, and parents; forced displacement within Ukraine or to other countries; threats to the mental health of children and adults; catastrophic drop of student enrollment in education; reduced access to education; and decreased quality of education in conflict-affected schools, and education system overload in more safe regions.¹⁹³

The plan includes priority activities to respond to each of these concerns. Regarding destruction of schools and other educational infrastructure, the ministry plan calls for directing some of its existing budget as well as anticipated international donor support for education towards reconstruction, where possible, and additional budget allocations and new international support for reconstruction.

In a November 2022 letter to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Education and Science stated that regional governments, civil-military authorities, and local governments are responsible for the repair and reconstruction of schools. The ministry did not respond to a question as to whether the ministry itself was financing reconstruction.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Concept Plan on the Functioning of the Education System, Research and Innovation sector of Ukraine during Martial Law and Further Reconstruction Period related to Russian Aggression (v.2.0 as of March 15, 2022),” <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023). See also: Analytical report prepared by Ukraine’s Ministry of Education and Science, “Education in Ukraine during Wartime,” 2022 (accessed May 30, 2023).

¹⁹³ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Concept Plan on the Functioning of the Education System, Research and Innovation sector of Ukraine during Martial Law and Further Reconstruction Period related to Russian Aggression (v.2.0 as of March 15, 2022),” <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023).

¹⁹⁴ Letter from Oleg Yeresko, Director General, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine Directorate of Inclusive and Out-of-School Education, to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022.

The government’s plan also mentions certain activities related to school buildings, such as their use as temporary shelters for internally displaced Ukrainians, which fall outside of the Ministry of Education and Science’s direct competency. The plan does not reference or set out steps to mitigate the dangers to teachers and students and the disruption of education due to the military use of schools.¹⁹⁵

Right to Education

Ukrainian law

Under Ukraine’s constitution, “Everyone has the right to education.”¹⁹⁶ The constitution also states that “complete general secondary education is compulsory,” and that the state is responsible for ensuring “accessible and free pre-school, complete general secondary, vocational and higher education in state and communal educational establishments.”¹⁹⁷ Ukraine’s Law on Education obliges the state to guarantee all students’ right “to have a safe and hazard-free conditions of studies.”¹⁹⁸

Ukraine’s 2004 Manual on the Implementation of the Rules of International Humanitarian Law in the Armed Forces contains a provision noting that: “...international humanitarian law envisages [that]: ... the right of children to receive an education shall be guaranteed.”¹⁹⁹

International Human Rights Law

International human rights law is applicable at all times, including during armed conflict. A number of international human rights law provisions are relevant to the issue of the military use of schools.

¹⁹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Concept Plan on the Functioning of the Education System, Research and Innovation sector of Ukraine during Martial Law and Further Reconstruction Period related to Russian Aggression (v.2.0 as of March 15, 2022),” <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023).

¹⁹⁶ Constitution of Ukraine, art. 53.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Law on Education, May 23, 1991, art. 51(1).

¹⁹⁹ Manual on the Implementation of the Rules of International Humanitarian Law in the Armed Forces, September 11, 2004, sec. 1.4.11.

International human rights law guarantees everyone the right to life, personal liberty, and security, protections applicable to students, teachers, and school staff.²⁰⁰ States shall also ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and the development of children.²⁰¹

As children, students under the age of 18 receive special protections under international human rights law. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the “best interests of the child” shall be a primary consideration.²⁰²

Everyone has the right to education.²⁰³ With a view to achieving the full realization of this right, states shall make primary education compulsory and available free to all; secondary education generally available and accessible to all; and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of capacity.²⁰⁴ The material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.²⁰⁵ States shall also take measures to encourage regular attendance by children at schools and the reduction of child dropout rates.²⁰⁶ With respect to children, states shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation.²⁰⁷

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the main international treaties guaranteeing the right to education for children, contains no provision for derogation or suspension during a state of emergency.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, art. 6, 9 & 10.

²⁰¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 .U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 5, U.N. Doc A/54/49 (Vol.1) (2000), entered into force December 22, 2000, art. 6.

²⁰² CRC, art. 3(1).

²⁰³ International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, art. 13; and CRC, art. 28.

²⁰⁴ ICESCR, art. 13(2)(a)-(d); and CRC, art. 28(a)-(d).

²⁰⁵ ICESCR, art. 13(2)(e).

²⁰⁶ CRC, art. 28(1)(e).

²⁰⁷ CRC, art. 4.

²⁰⁸ Similarly, the ICESCR provides no derogation provision; however, article 4 permits states to limit rights when prescribed by law to the extent compatible with the nature of the right and for the purpose of promoting general public welfare. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has noted that in regard to the right to education, “[article 4] is primarily intended to be protective of the rights of individuals rather than permissive of the imposition of limitations by the State.

Education Since February 23, 2022

After Russia’s full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian government initially ordered schools nationwide to extend a vacation period for another two weeks, after which many schools were closed for in-person learning depending on the security situation in their respective areas.

In a nationwide survey of parents conducted by the Ukrainian think tank Cedos, jointly with Ukrainian foundations SavED and the International Renaissance Foundation, from December 20, 2022 to January 24, 2023, 40 percent of parents who responded said that their children had been out of school for up to 14 days since the start of the full-scale invasion; 29 percent of children had not attended school for 14 to 30 days; and 9 percent had not attended for 30-60 days.²⁰⁹

The survey found that the most common reasons why children missed school at the beginning of the full-scale conflict were: lack of electricity (58 percent), air raid alarms (60 percent), bad internet connection (50 percent), illness (39 percent) and forced vacations (14 percent).

The survey did not link these factors to military attacks on schools and military use of schools. But some of the factors cited in the survey—for example bad internet connection—could reflect students who had to study online because of damage to their schools.

When schools re-opened, they were operating in a variety of formats, combining distance and in-person learning.

As of January 2023, 12,926 general secondary education institutions in Ukraine were operational. Of those, 3,955 were holding classes in person; 4,363 were operating solely

Consequently, a State party which closes a university or other education institution on grounds such as national security... has the burden of justifying such a serious measure in relation to each of the elements identified in article 4.” UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 13–The Right to Education, (1999), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), para. 42.

²⁰⁹ Cedos, *War and Education. How a Year of Full-Scale Invasion Affected Ukrainian Schools*, March 20, 2023, pp. 56, <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/vijna-ta-osvita-yak-rik-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-vplynuv-na-ukrayinski-shkoly/> (accessed August 17, 2023).

remotely; and 4, 608 were using a blended format of in-person and remote learning.²¹⁰ There were 905 schools in areas under Russian occupation.

The ministry reported that over 95 percent of eligible students were enrolled.²¹¹ According to the United Nations, there were an estimated 1 million internally displaced children in Ukraine.²¹² Nearly 163,000 displaced school-aged children were enrolled in schools in their locations of temporary residence as of December 2022.²¹³

As of January 2023, 9,689 kindergartens were operational and providing services to 64 percent of eligible children. Others were holding classes remotely or partially remotely.²¹⁴

The type of learning format is determined by the educational institution director and the regional civil-military administrations, in consultation with parents and teachers, and can change in the course of academic year based on the security situation.²¹⁵ In areas of active hostilities, including areas facing shelling and other attacks, teaching continues to be carried out remotely.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of January 2023)” <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19UxynvPVEXMVfwoUJcuxNirP1UWiXgSX/view> (accessed June 18, 2023).

²¹¹ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of December 2022),” <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023).

²¹² “Ukraine: Education Cluster Dashboard,” December 7, 2022, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine_education_cluster_dashboard_as_of_7_december_2022.pdf (accessed January 9, 2023).

²¹³ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of December 2022),” <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023).

²¹⁴ Ibid. See also, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of January 2023)” <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19UxynvPVEXMVfwoUJcuxNirP1UWiXgSX/view> (accessed June 18, 2023).

²¹⁵ Letter from Oleg Yeresko to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022, and Ukraine Education Cluster, “National Coordination Meeting Minutes,” September 16, 2022, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/educluster_meeting_notes_20220916.pdf (accessed January 9, 2023).

Analytical report prepared by Ukraine’s Ministry of Education and Science, “Education in Ukraine during Wartime,” 2022 (accessed May 30, 2023).

²¹⁶ Letter from Oleg Yeresko to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022, and Ukraine Education Cluster, “National Coordination Meeting Minutes,” September 16, 2022, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/educluster_meeting_notes_20220916.pdf (accessed January 9, 2023).

According to school directors interviewed by Human Rights Watch, as indicated in several of the school-specific accounts above, children who attended schools that were severely damaged or destroyed were in some cases able to relocate to another school nearby that had not been damaged or had been repaired. In some cases, if education was in person, children have had to attend a shortened school day or study in shifts to accommodate an increased number of students. Many students from schools that were damaged or destroyed have continued their studies remotely.

For example, in Chernihivska region, six schools were destroyed and 47 damaged as of September 2022.²¹⁷ The director of School Number 19, which was repeatedly attacked and severely damaged in March 2022, said: “Children do not have access to physical classrooms in our school. Ten classes, grades 1, 2 and 5 go to School Number 1, and study in the second shift.”²¹⁸

Another school in Chernihiv, School Number 13, reopened for the 2022-2023 school year in September 2022 for its own 380 students and more than 800 children, as well as teachers and other staff, from School Number 18 and School Number 21, which were destroyed.²¹⁹

Valentyna Hradobyk, the head of the education department in Nizhyn, in the Chernihivska region said: “Children from the schools that shut down were transferred to ones that function. In some cases, we transferred entire classes together with class teachers. Everyone is doing distant learning.”²²⁰

Challenges of Distance Learning

Iryna described the remote learning program her children’s school in Iziium was following as of November 2022: “The teachers give assignments, and we have to do our best to teach them at home. There is no internet, so no video lessons.”²²¹

²¹⁷ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Information on destroyed and damaged educational institutions as of September 1, 2022,” Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, (accessed May 30, 2023). <https://www.weareukraine.info/over-2800-educational-institutions-damaged-and-destroyed-in-ukraine/>

²¹⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Liudmila Shelypets, director, Chernihiv School Number 19, October 26, 2022.

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Olena Ashmankevych, deputy director, School Number 13, Chernihiv, July 6, 2022

²²⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Valentyna Hradobyk, head, Nizhyn City Education Department, October 26, 2022.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna, School Number 11, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

She said remote learning was manageable with her 8-year-old son because his assignments are relatively simple, teachers can convey them by phone or text message, and she was better positioned to help him. But for her 14-year-old son, assignments are more complicated, and require video explainers. Iryna said: “For the older one, you can’t just do it by phone, you need a laptop. He can’t setup the virtual classroom on his phone.”²²²

As of September 1, 2022, according to the nationwide survey undertaken by Cedos/SaveED, 51 percent of Ukrainian children in 10th and 11th grades were studying remotely; 47 percent in grades 5 to 9; and 41 percent in grades 1 to 4.²²³

Remote learning presents a particular set of significant difficulties for Ukrainian students, teachers, and parents. For example, a striking 72 percent of parents interviewed for the Cedos survey said their children needed additional measures to compensate for educational gaps in their knowledge and skills due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022.²²⁴

Teachers interviewed for the survey found that remote education has had a significant negative impact on the educational results of students in Ukraine, caused by “irregular conduct and attendance of online lessons, unsystematic explanation of new material by the teacher, or lack of technical resources or insufficient level of skills in the use of digital educational tools.”

As the deputy director of a school in Bucha told Human Rights Watch: “In September, we tried to arrange for [younger] children to attend in-person classes in the part of the school building that was less damaged. But, because of constant air raid alerts and the increased attacks in the Kyiv region, we had to shift to online learning.”²²⁵

²²² Human Rights Watch interview with Iryna, School Number 11, Izium, November 3, 2022.

²²³ Cedos, “War and Education. How a year of full-scale invasion affected Ukrainian schools,” March 20, 2023, <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/vijna-ta-osvita-yak-rik-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-vplynuv-na-ukrayinski-shkoly/> (Accessed June 18, 2023). Human Rights Watch did not examine whether this percentage breakdown replicated after January 2023.

²²⁴ Ibid..

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Halyna Ivanivna, deputy director, Bucha School Number 3, October 25, 2022.

The Ukrainian government allows children in Russian-occupied territories to continue their education through schools in Ukrainian-controlled territory, including via online education or homeschooling. Russian occupying authorities have prohibited online study in the Ukrainian school system and require students to attend in-person classes in the Russian curriculum.²²⁶ However, more than 94,000 children who ended up in the occupied territories continued to receive education in 1,230 schools in the government-controlled territory of Ukraine, according to the Ministry of Education and Science.²²⁷ Ukrainian children can study independently and pass annual exams in any school in order to receive educational certificates.²²⁸

For example, Borodianka Lyceum, which had extensive damage from rocket and bomb attacks, and Russian vandalism and looting, was providing schooling during the 2022-23 school year to 16 children studying remotely from the occupied areas of the Khersonska region.²²⁹

Remote education in government-controlled territories is regularly disrupted when there are electricity and internet outages as a result of Russian attacks on critical infrastructure.²³⁰

Additionally, many parents have left the place where they permanently lived before February 24, 2022, and not everyone has, or managed to take with them when they left, their own devices or information technology equipment. And some lost devices due to active hostilities or the occupation: many people who lived in occupied territories say Russian forces stole civilian property, in particular mobile phones and laptops. Others note that students often have to share devices necessary for studying, such as laptops, with other family members.²³¹

²²⁶ A forthcoming Human Rights Watch publication will document this and Russia's imposition of the Russian school curriculum in areas its forces occupy.

²²⁷ Letter from Oleg Yeresko, director general, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine Directorate of Inclusive and Out-of-School Education, to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022.

²²⁸ Letter from Oleg Yeresko to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022.

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Inna Romaniuk, June 19, 2023.

²³⁰ OHCHR, "Statement at the end of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine's visit to Kyiv," December 2, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/12/statement-end-un-independent-international-commission-inquiry-ukraines-visit> (accessed January 5, 2023).

²³¹ See, for example, <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/vijna-ta-osvita-yak-rik-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-vplynuv-na-ukrayinski-shkoly/> [per comment above, give full citations for all stand-alone URL citations in the report]

In a December 2022 report, the Ministry of Science and Education stated that it had secured more than 64,000 laptops for teachers and schools from technology companies and UN agencies.²³²

As of February 13, 2023, international and charitable organizations had provided almost 79,000 technical devices to teachers (covering 44 percent of schools' stated needs for them). Another 16,000 devices for teachers were expected to be provided during 2023.²³³

In some schools in the Chernihivska and Kyivska regions, digital educational centers have been established with the support of donors, such as SavED and Save the Children. These centers provide students with the opportunity to attend classes even if their regular school is not operational due to damage or repair work. Teachers have observed that children visit these centers several times a week, participating in additional classes organized by teachers, engaging in extracurricular activities, and attending educational sessions.²³⁴

Transportation Problems

As of January 2023, a total of 1,874 school buses were destroyed, damaged, lost during occupation, handed over for evacuation or for use by Ukrainian armed forces, or stolen or removed to Russia or Russia-occupied areas.

For example, Dorohynka school in Chernihivska region, significantly damaged by an attack in March 2022, reopened in September 2022 for 114 schoolchildren and 25 teachers, but without school buses, apparently for budgetary reasons, to bring children to school. As of September 19, 2022, children whose parents could bring them to school attended the school in the morning, until 1:10 p.m. Students lacking transportation had to study online in the afternoon.²³⁵

²³² Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, "Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine in terms of Russian aggression (as of December 2022), <https://mon.gov.ua/eng/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni> (accessed January 5, 2023).

²³³ Cedos, "War and Education. How a year of full-scale invasion affected Ukrainian schools," March 20, 2023, <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/vijna-ta-osvita-yak-rik-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-vplynuv-na-ukrayinski-shkoly/> (Accessed June 18, 2023).

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Raisa Degtiarenko, director, Dorohynka School, October 25, 2022.

Psychosocial Impact

Psychosocial impacts of war can be serious for children. The Ukrainian government reports that it is providing psychosocial support services in overcoming stress, experience of loss, sorrow, and suffering with the involvement of school psychologists, social studies teachers, and teaching methods instructors, as well as by making psychotherapy available to children who lost parents or homes, have health issues, were injured or experienced shelling, or became internally displaced persons or refugees.²³⁶ According to the Cedos survey, conducted between December 2022 and January 2023, the majority of parents interviewed said that they observed symptoms of stress in their children, such as deterioration of the quality and duration of sleep, problems with concentration, and difficulties in communication, among other issues. Forty-two percent of parents observed a high level of anxiety in their children, another 14 percent believe that their children were anxious often or all the time. Due to the need to study remotely, children feel lonely: 24 percent of parents mentioned lack of communication as one of the main problems their children face.

Teachers have also experienced significant stress and deterioration of their psycho-emotional state, particularly in communities where active hostilities are or were taking place or which are or were occupied. Damage or destruction of their schools by Russian troops has contributed to the stress. Teachers described the feelings they experienced as a state of depression and a constant sense of loss.²³⁷

Furthermore, teachers nationwide report facing challenges during air raids and power cuts, as well as managing the workload of absent colleagues, which increases stress and lowers the quality of education they provide. Conditions are obviously particularly difficult near the front lines. For example, far more teachers and students have left Kharkivska region, compared to Kyivska and Chernihivska regions, due to the longer period of occupation of Kharkivska region and longer hostilities there.²³⁸

²³⁶ Letter from Oleg Yeresko to Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2022.

²³⁷ Cedos, "War and Education. How a year of full-scale invasion affected Ukrainian schools," March 20, 2023, <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/vijna-ta-osvita-yak-rik-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-vplynuv-na-ukrayinski-shkoly/> (Accessed June 18, 2023).

²³⁸ Ibid.

Another nationwide survey by a Ukrainian group, GoGlobal, found that Ukrainian teachers are currently taking on an excessive workload. Eighty percent of the teachers surveyed said their job demands and responsibilities have greatly increased; 54 percent expressed the need for psychological support.²³⁹

²³⁹ Osvitoria, “Education in the context of war: how have teachers and students changed over the past year?” undated, <https://osvitoria.media/experience/osvita-v-umovah-vijny-yak-zminylysya-vchyteli-ta-uchni-za-mynulyj-rik/>, (accessed June 18, 2023)

The Safe Schools Declaration

The Safe Schools Declaration, launched in Oslo, Norway in May 2015, is a political commitment by governments to take concrete steps to make students, teachers, and schools safer during armed conflict and ensure continuity of education during armed conflict including by agreeing to refrain from using schools for military purposes. As of October 2023, 118 countries including Ukraine but not Russia had endorsed the Declaration.²⁴⁰

Among the commitments governments make when signing the declaration is to implement the “Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.” The “Guidelines” draw upon existing obligations under both the international law of armed conflict and international human rights law. They state: “Parties to armed conflict are urged not to use schools and universities for any purpose in support of the military effort. While it is acknowledged that certain uses would not be contrary to the law of armed conflict, all parties should endeavor to avoid impinging on students’ safety and education.”²⁴¹

Guideline 1 states that functioning schools and universities should not be used by parties to an armed conflict for military purposes. Guideline 2 states that parties to an armed conflict should not use schools and universities “that have been abandoned or evacuated because of the dangers presented by armed conflict . . . except in extenuating circumstances when they are presented with no viable alternative, and only for as long as no choice is possible” and lists other conditions to which armed forces should adhere regarding the use and clearance of remnants post-use.²⁴²

By also drawing upon existing examples of good practice already applied by some parties to armed conflict, the “Guidelines” reflect what is practically achievable and acknowledge that parties to armed conflict are invariably faced with difficult dilemmas requiring

²⁴⁰ “Safe Schools Declarations Endorsements,” <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/endorsement/> (accessed December 12, 2022).

²⁴¹ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict,” March 18, 2014, <http://protectingeducation.org/guidelines> (accessed December 12, 2022).

²⁴² *Ibid.*

pragmatic solutions. In addition, a number of government armed forces and some non-state armed groups have developed military orders or doctrines that clearly spell out protections for schools from military use, including explicit prohibitions on the use of schools for military purposes.²⁴³

In 2011, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to urge all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children’s access to education and requested that the UN secretary-general monitor and report to the Security Council on the issue of military use of schools.²⁴⁴

In June 2015, the Security Council had expressed “deep concern that the military use of schools in contravention of applicable international law may render schools legitimate targets of attack, thus endangering the safety of children and in this regard encourages Member States to take concrete measures to deter such use of schools by armed forces and armed groups.”²⁴⁵

On October 29, 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2601 on the protection of education during conflict, which condemned attacks against schools, children, and teachers and urges parties to the conflict to immediately safeguard the right to education. The resolution references the Safe Schools Declaration, and makes explicit the links between education, peace, and security.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ See, e.g., Colombia: General Commander of the Military Forces, order of July 6, 2010, official document Number 2010124005981 / CGFM-CGING-25.11 (“Considering International Humanitarian Law norms, it is considered a clear violation of the Principle of Distinction and the Principle of Precaution in attacks and, therefore a serious fault, the fact that a commander occupies or allows the occupation by his troops, of ... public institutions such as education establishments.”); Democratic Republic of Congo: Ministerial Directive on the implementation of the Action Plan, Ministry of Defense, Disarmament and Veterans, N°VPM/MDNAC/CAB/0909/2013, May 3, 2013 (“all those found guilty of one of the following shortcomings will face severe criminal and disciplinary sanctions: ... Attacks against schools ... requisition of schools ... for military purposes, destruction of school facilities”); Philippines: Armed Forces of the Philippines Letter Directive No. 34, GHQ AFP, November 24, 2009 (“All [Armed Forces of the Philippines] personnel shall strictly abide and respect the following: ... Basic infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and health units shall not be utilized for military purposes such as command posts, barracks, detachments, and supply depots.”); Poland: Armed Forces of Poland Accommodation Act, No. 86, item 433, June 22, 1995, as amended, chapter 7, art. 64(1) (“The following types of real property are not subject to temporary quartering: ... real property of institutions of higher education...”).

²⁴⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011), S/Res/1998 (2011), para. 4.

²⁴⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2143 (2015), S/Res/2143 (2015), para. 18.

²⁴⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021), October 29, 2021, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/313/76/PDF/N2131376.pdf?OpenElement>

Ukraine in November 2019 endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Ministry of Education began to develop an implementation plan, with the support of Save the Children, UNICEF and the UN Ukraine Education Cluster. According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Ukraine adopted an action plan for implementation in August 2021. It also reported that civil society was supporting the government in training officers in the armed forces on the Safe Schools Declaration and the “Guidelines.” As of January 2022, at least 1,000 military officials in Ukraine had been trained.²⁴⁷

The European Union, a key partner for Ukraine, stated in its 2021 Strategy on the Rights of the Child stated that the European Commission’s key actions include “continue allocating 10% of humanitarian aid funding for education in emergencies and protracted crises, and promote the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “Practical Impact of the Safe Schools Declaration,” January 2022, <http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/SSD-Fact-Sheet.pdf>. Regarding training, Save the Children reported training more than 50 officers from the Ukrainian General Staff and the brigades operating in the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine in December 2019, “The Ukraine Education Cluster Meeting Notes August 18, 2020,” <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ukraine/document/uec-online-meeting-minutes-18th-august-2020> (accessed October 30, 2023).

²⁴⁸ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2021) 142, March 24, 2021.

Acknowledgments

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Rachel Denber edited the report. James Ross, Legal and Policy director, provided legal review and writing, and Joseph Saunders, deputy program director, provided programmatic review. Specialist reviews were provided by Sam Dubberly, Digital Investigations Lab managing director; Mark Hiznay, Arms division associate director; Bill van Esveld, Richard Weir, and Belkis Wille. Karolina Kozik, Disability Rights division assistant researcher, Iskra Kirova, Europe and Central Asia division advocacy director, reviewed the recommendations.

The report was prepared for publication by Ellen Bleier, Europe and Central Asia division associate; publications officer, Travis Carr; and senior administrative manager, Fitzroy Hepkins.

Annex I: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, September 5, 2023

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: +1-212-290-4700
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

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September 5, 2023

Ministry of Defense of Ukraine
Povtroflotsky Avenue, 6
03168, Kyiv-168



HRW.org

Re: Attacks on schools in Ukraine

Human Rights Watch is preparing a report on attacks on schools in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to document the damage and destruction of schools and the impact on Ukrainian children's access to education. An important part of this issue both now and in the future relates to military use of schools. We are reaching out to your Ministry to seek information about this matter.

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization whose work involves investigating and documenting human rights abuses in over 100 countries and supporting efforts to ensure that those most responsible for serious abuses are held to account. We have conducted extensive research on human rights and laws of war violations since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. We acknowledge the important step taken by the Ukrainian government in 2019 to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

Since February 24, 2022, we have had a team of researchers continuously present in Ukraine. We have published dozens of reports and other publications on countless war crimes committed by Russian forces in Ukraine and other grave human rights abuses.

As part of our research on the military use of schools, we have documented Russian forces' military use of schools and kindergartens in the Kyivska, Chernihivska, and Kharkivska regions, during which they damaged, destroyed, and looted movable school property, including furniture, computers, televisions, projectors, interactive boards, and other equipment. We also documented damage Russian forces caused to school and kindergarten interiors. We [previously documented](#) Russian forces' [illegal detention](#) of civilians who [reported](#) being tortured and ill-treated in schools.

We also documented Russian forces' attacks on schools and kindergartens in the Kyivska, Chernihivska, and Kharkivska regions, resulting in significant damage and destruction, including in some cases damage beyond repair.

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We have also identified instances in which Ukrainian forces attacked schools occupied by Russian forces and several instances in which Ukrainian forces have used schools for military purposes by deploying forces in or near the schools, storing munitions on school premises and placing military equipment in close proximity to schools.

We would welcome the response of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to the following questions regarding our current research on attacks on and military use of schools, so that we may reflect the Ukrainian government's information in our reporting.

1. We understand that the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has issued an order on school safety, and that the Ministry of Education and Science is undertaking other school safety initiatives. Please explain any additional measures the Defense Ministry has undertaken to ensure the safety of Ukrainian schools and schoolchildren during the war.
2. Since the Ukrainian government signed the Safe Schools Declaration in 2019, what instructions has the Defense Ministry given the Armed Forces of Ukraine regarding the military use of schools? What guidelines has the Defense Ministry given the Armed Forces of Ukraine on this issue? Specifically, has the Defense Ministry undertaken to impart among the Armed Forces of Ukraine the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict, which Ukraine pledged to operationalize by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration?
3. Since February 24, 2022, has the Defense Ministry or any other government structures or officials issued specific orders or other instructions to the Ukrainian Armed Forces or Territorial Defense Units regarding the military use of schools? Please provide the content of any such orders, the timing of such orders or instructions, the number of times they have been issued, their mode of implementation and oversight, and any penalties for failure to implement them.
4. Is the Defense Ministry aware of the Russian military using Ukrainian schools for military purposes since February 24, 2022? Please provide the number of cases, and when and where they occurred. Does the Defense Ministry have information on how many of these schools were attacked by Ukrainian forces while Russian forces were using them or when Russian forces were nearby?
5. Is the Defense Ministry aware of schools that have been used by the Ukrainian military since February 24, 2022? Please provide the number of cases, and when and where they occurred. Does the Defense Ministry have information on how many of these schools were attacked by Russian forces during or after this use or when Ukrainian forces were nearby?
6. Does the Defense Ministry examine the condition of schools when vacated by Ukrainian forces? Russian forces? For example, do you examine for

contamination by landmines, unexploded cluster munitions, or other explosive remnants of war left behind in school buildings and yards? Has the ministry examined the damage to school property from the use of schools? Are there examples of damage to school property that the ministry is aware of from such use by the Russian military since February 24, 2022? Are there examples of such damage by the Ukrainian military?

7. Describe the procedure by which the Ukrainian armed forces, when they consider using a school for military purposes, consider alternative options for deployment that avoid the use of schools?
8. Describe the procedure Ukrainian forces follow, in instances in which they use schools for military purposes, to protect civilians from resulting military operations in the vicinity of such schools. Please provide examples.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I would be grateful to receive Ministry's responses to the questions in this letter by September 20 to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in order to allow us to reflect the response in our report.

Sincerely,



Hugh Williamson
Director
Europe and Central Asia division

Annex II: Response from the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine

Department of Humanitarian Provision
Ministry of Defense of Ukraine

On the request without No. dated September 5, 2023

The Department of Humanitarian Provision of Ukraine's Defense Ministry processed a letter from the international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch regarding ensuring the safety of educational facilities during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

As informed by the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), the Order of the UAF's Supreme Commander-in-Chief "On the Decision of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's Staff Meeting" dated July 26, 2022, No. 1Т/БГК regulates further non-use of premises of the educational facilities for the temporary accommodation of the military headquarters and units.

It should be noted that requirements on compliance with norms of international humanitarian law (IHL) are prescribed in the UAF's Statute of the Internal Service, Field Manuals of the Ground Forces of Ukraine, Instructions on the Implementation Procedure of IHL Standards in the UAF, approved by order of the Defense Ministry on March 23, 2017 No. 164, registered in Ukraine's Justice Ministry on June 9, 2017 under No. 704/30572 (with amendments), etc.

The distribution of knowledge on IHL, including on protecting and fulfilling children's rights, is carried out at all levels of the training system and among all categories of UAF's servicemen.

Also, according to the joint order of Ukraine's Interior Ministry and Ukraine's Defense Ministry No. 833/443 dated December 21, 2022 "On Approval of the Implementation Procedures of the Priority Measures of Explosives Disposal (Destruction) on the Territory of Ukraine and Organization of Interaction During Their Execution", UAF's engineering units carry out demining and cleaning of the areas (objects) from explosives as a part of the operational response on detecting such objects in the assigned to UAF's units areas.

Therefore, servicemen of the UAF have the necessary basic level of IHL knowledge, which is sufficient for planning and implementing troops' operations, including the ability to distinguish between military and civilian objects and prohibited attacks.

Nazim Agaev, Interim Director of the Department



ДЕПАРТАМЕНТ
ГУМАНІТАРНОГО
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УКРАЇНИ
Код 26629283

03168, Київ-168
Повітрофлотський проспект, 6

МНО "Human Rights Watch"

На б/н від 05.09.2023

У Департаменті гуманітарного забезпечення Міністерства оборони України за дорученням опрацьовано лист Міжнародної неурядової організації "Human Rights Watch" щодо забезпечення безпеки закладів освіти під час повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну.

За інформацією, наданою Генеральним штабом Збройних Сил України, повідомляється, що відповідно до наказу Верховного Головнокомандувача Збройних Сил України "Про рішення Ставки Верховного Головнокомандувача Збройних Сил України" від 26.07.2022 №1т/ВГК встановлено подальше невикористання військовими частинами та підрозділами фондів закладів освіти для облаштування місць їх тимчасового розміщення.

Слід зазначити, що вимоги стосовно дотримання норм міжнародного гуманітарного права (далі – МГП) імплементовано до Статуту внутрішньої служби Збройних Сил України, Бойових статутів Сухопутних військ Збройних Сил України, Інструкції про порядок виконання норм міжнародного гуманітарного права в Збройних Силах України, затвердженої наказом Міністерства оборони України від 23.03.2017 № 164, зареєстрованої у Міністерстві юстиції України 09.06.2017 за № 704/30572 (із змінами) тощо.

Поширення знань із МГП, у тому числі з питань захисту та забезпечення прав дітей, здійснюється на всіх рівнях системи підготовки та з усіма категоріями військовослужбовців Збройних Сил України.

Також відповідно до спільного наказу Міністерства внутрішніх справ України та Міністерства оборони України № 833/443 від 21.12.2022 "Про затвердження Порядку здійснення першочергових заходів щодо знешкодження (знищення) вибухонебезпечних предметів на території України та організації взаємодії під час їх виконання" інженерні підрозділи Збройних Сил України



ДОКУМЕНТ СЕДО
Сертифікат 5B77CE19CBB35C6404000000122D0000B24A0100
Підписувач Агаєв Назім Асафович
Дійсний з 28.06.2023 14:18:08 по 28.06.2025 14:18:08

Департамент гуманітарного забезпечення Міністерства оборони
України



414/1986 від 27.09.2023 12:27

проводять розмінування місцевості (об'єктів) та очищення місцевості (об'єктів) від вибухонебезпечних предметів під час оперативного реагування на виявлення таких предметів у районах виконання підрозділами Збройних Сил України завдань за призначенням.

Отже, військовослужбовці Збройних Сил України мають необхідний базовий рівень знань з МГП, що дозволяє їм на належному рівні застосовувати набуті знання під час планування та застосування військ (сил), у тому числі проводити розрізнення між військовими та цивільними об'єктами, напади на які є забороненими.

Тимчасово виконуючий обов'язки
директора Департаменту

Назім АГАЄВ

Annex III: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, October 11, 2023

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: +1-212-290-4700
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

Tirana Hassan, Executive Director

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Frederika Kaltheimer, Technology and Human Rights

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Andrew Zelli

October 11, 2023

To: Department of Humanitarian Support of the
Ministry of Defense of Ukraine
Code 2662983

Mr Nazim Agaev, Acting Department Director



HRW.org

Re: Seeking further clarification in relation to the Ministry of Defense communication N° 414/1986 from September 27, 2023

Dear Mr Agaev,

On September 5, 2023, Human Rights Watch wrote to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine seeking information in relation to Human Rights Watch's ongoing research on attacks on education and military use of schools in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine.

We acknowledge the receipt of the letter number 414/1986 sent by your department on September 27, 2023, which contained responses to our queries. We will reflect them in our report on attacks on schools in Ukraine, scheduled for publication in November. We are deeply grateful for your cooperation and value the ongoing productive dialogue with the Ministry.

As we understand from the Ministry's response, the Order of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Supreme Commander-in-Chief "On the Decision of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's Staff Meeting" (the "Order") dated July 26, 2022, No. 17/ВГК prohibited the use of educational facilities' premises for the temporary housing of military headquarters and units.

We are seeking to further clarify the following:

1. Could you share more details on the Order's mode of implementation and oversight to date, as well as any existing disciplinary measures for failure to implement it?

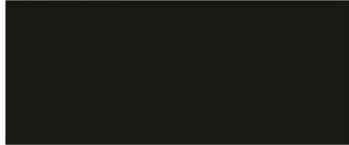
AMMAN - AMSTERDAM - BEIRUT - BERLIN - BRUSSELS - CHICAGO - COPENHAGEN - GENEVA - GOMA - JOHANNESBURG - KYIV - KINSHASA - LONDON - LOS ANGELES - MIAMI - NAIROBI - NEW YORK - PARIS - SAN FRANCISCO - SÃO PAULO - SILICON VALLEY - STOCKHOLM - SYDNEY - TOKYO - TORONTO - WASHINGTON - ZÜRICH

2. Since July 2022, have there been any follow-up orders or other, additional steps put in place regarding attacks on and military use of schools in the context of the current armed conflict?

We would like to thank you, Mr Agaev, and the staff of the Ministry for the attention to this matter. We would be grateful to receive your response at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] by October 24, so we can reflect it in our reporting.

We stand ready to provide any additional comments or information, if needed.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Hugh Williamson.

Hugh Williamson
Director
Europe and Central Asia division

Annex IV: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, November 10, 2022

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: +1-212-290-4700
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

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Isabelle de Wismes
Masa Yanagisawa
Andrew Zolli

November 10, 2022

Serhiy Shkarlet
Minister
Ministry of Education and Science of
Ukraine
Prospect Peremohy, 10
Kyiv, Ukraine 01135



HRW.org

CC: Vasyl Lozynskii, Acting Minister for Communities and Territories Development

Dear Minister Shkarlet,

Human Rights Watch is conducting research on attacks on schools in Kharkivska, Chernihivska, and Kyivska regions. We are documenting the impacts of damage and destruction of schools during the war on the right to education. We are reaching out to your ministry to seek information about this issue.

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization whose work involves investigating and documenting human rights abuses in over 100 countries and supporting efforts to ensure that those most responsible for serious abuses are held to account. We have conducted extensive research on human rights and laws of war violations since Russia's war with Ukraine first began in 2014.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, we have had a team of researchers present in Ukraine. We have published [dozens of reports and other publications](#), including on the siege of Mariupol; unlawful ground and airstrikes targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure in numerous locations; Russia's use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions and antipersonnel mines; abuses against prisoners of war; summary executions, torture, enforced disappearances, and unlawful detention of civilians by Russian forces during their occupation of areas of Kyivska, Chernihivska, Kharkivska, Khersonska, and Zaporizska

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regions; the abusive and punitive “filtration” screening process; and the crime of forcibly transferring Ukrainian civilians to Russia, among other topics.

We hope that this documentation will serve an important foundation for accountability efforts.

We are grateful for the ministry’s full cooperation during the preparation of our 2016 [report](#) on attacks on schools in Donetska and Luhanska regions. We acknowledge the important step taken by the Ukrainian government in 2019 to sign the Safe Schools Declaration, and the subsequent development of the National Plan on the Safe Schools Declaration, and establishment of the Interinstitutional Working Group on Safe Schools Declaration Implementation.

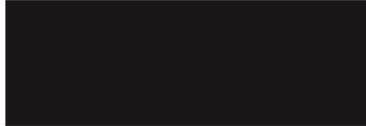
We would welcome your response to the following questions regarding our current research on attacks on schools, so that we may incorporate the Ukrainian government’s information in our reporting.

- According to the latest figures of the ministry, how many schools in government-controlled areas in Ukraine have suffered damage since February 24, 2022? How many schools in areas under Russian occupation in Ukraine have suffered damage since February 24, 2022?
- Of those, how many are destroyed or damaged beyond repair?
- What steps is the ministry taking to repair and rebuild schools in government-controlled areas that have been damaged and destroyed?
- How many schools have been repaired to date and how much has the government already spent on reconstruction efforts of school facilities?
- What is your current estimate of the cost necessary to repair and reconstruct schools that have to date been damaged or destroyed?
- What was the total student enrollment, prior to February 2022, in the schools that have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair?
- In its repair and reconstruction of schools, what steps, if any, is the ministry taking to ensure accessibility of schools, including for children with physical, sensory, and other types of disabilities? How is it consulting with persons with disabilities in the repair and reconstruction of schools?
- What steps is the ministry taking to ensure that all children living in areas where there is no functioning school building can access education?
- What steps is the ministry taking, as necessary in coordination with Ukraine’s Ministry of Social Policy and regional and local administrations, to provide psychosocial support services to schoolchildren and teachers, particularly those with direct experience of the war?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to sharing our key findings with you in person in Kyiv, in advance of publication.

I would be grateful to receive your responses to the questions in this letter by December 5, 2022, to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Hugh Williamson
Director
Europe and Central Asia division
Human Rights Watch

Annex V: Response from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

Directorate of Inclusive and Out-of-School Education

10, Peremohy Ave. Kyiv, 01135, tel. (044) 481-47-58, fax (044) 481-32-87, e-mail: dps@mon.gov.ua

To Human Rights Watch
kvitkak@hrw.org
gorbuny@hrw.org.

In reply to the Human Rights Watch letter dated November 10, 2022, registered with the MES on 11.11.2022 under No. 28475/0/1-22, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, within its competence, provides available information concerning the enforcement of students' right to education under martial law in Ukraine.

Annex: on 4 pages.

Director General
YERESKO

Oleg

Tetiana Zaporozhets, +38 098 414 79 39

[QR code]

MES № 4/3387-22 of 25.11.2022

Signed by: Yaresko Oleg Viktorovich

Certificate: 58E2O9E7E900307B04000000C7693300A9EC9B00

Valid: from 25.11.2021 13:21:11 to 25.11.2023 13:21:11

**Information
concerning the enforcement of students' right to education
under martial law in Ukraine**

How many schools have been damaged and destroyed since February 24, 2022?

According to the information collected by local education authorities, as of 11.18.2022, as a result of the Russian military aggression, since February 24, 2022 180 general secondary education institutions were completely destroyed in Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhzhia, and Kyiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson and Chernihiv regions. At the same time, 1,119 general secondary education institutions in 19 regions and the city of Kyiv suffered damages.

Concerning the repair and reconstruction of damaged or destroyed general secondary education institutions.

Repair and reconstruction of such institutions shall be carried out at the expense of state and local budgets and other legal sources.

Under Article 32 of the Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine", the management issues of educational institutions owned by or transferred to territorial communities are in power of their own (self-governing) executive bodies of village, settlement, and city councils.

Government authorities, civil-military administrations and local self-government bodies, heads of education authorities and educational institutions, and their founders shall provide state guarantees, create a safe educational environment, and manage the educational process under martial law within their competence.

All students have the opportunity to get an education.

Concerning the number of students studied in general secondary education institutions until February 24, 2022

At the beginning of the 2021/2022 academic year, until the hostilities outbreak in Ukraine, there were 13,991 general secondary education institutions, with more than 4.2 million students.

According to the information collected by the local education authorities, as of November 21, 2022, there are 12,915 general education institutions in Ukraine providing various educational services to more than 4 million students.

What measures does the Ministry take to ensure the accessibility of schools, including for children with physical, sensory and other disabilities, during the repair and reconstruction of schools? How are persons with disabilities involved in consultations during the repair and reconstruction of schools?

The development of an inclusive educational environment, particularly in educational institutions most accessible and close to the place of residence of persons with special educational needs, ensuring universal design and reasonable accommodation in educational institutions are among the fundamental principles of state educational policy and educational activities.

Under Article 20, part 4 of the Law of Ukraine "On Education", buildings, facilities and premises of educational institutions and inclusive resource centers should meet accessibility requirements in accordance with construction norms and standards.

Clause 25 of the Licensing Conditions for Educational Activities, approved by the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1187 dated

December 30, 2015 (as amended by the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 365 dated March 24, 2021), states that the licensee must ensure the accessibility of educational premises for persons with disabilities and other low-mobility persons, in particular the unrestricted access to the building, classrooms and other facilities in accordance with state building codes, rules and standards.

The primary regulatory act establishing the requirements for the inclusive educational environment is the State Construction Standards DBN V.2.2-40:2018 "Inclusiveness of Buildings and Structures". These construction standards provide technical characteristics of the accessibility elements for persons with musculoskeletal disorders, vision and hearing disabilities, mental development disorders and other people with limited mobility.

Unimpeded access to buildings, premises and ground areas of all educational institutions is required by the State Construction Standards DBN B.2.2-3:2018 "Buildings and structures. Educational institutions" and DBN B.2.2-4: 2018 "Buildings and structures. Pre-school educational institution".

State building codes are the regulatory acts mandatory for implementation and consideration in the design and construction of new and reconstruction of existing buildings, structures, and premises of educational institutions.

Compliance with these standards will make it possible to create an inclusive educational environment and to exercise the state-guaranteed right to quality and affordable education for children with special educational needs.

Ensuring the accessibility of educational institutions in accordance with state building standards falls within the competence of local self-government bodies, which, in accordance with the law, control compliance with the requirements of laws and other normative legal acts in the field of education in the respective territories and make sure that citizens get a complete general secondary education.

Given the above, when restoring, reconstructing and repairing educational institutions, construction customers should take measures to ensure the educational institutions accessibility for persons with disabilities and other people with limited mobility in accordance with the state construction standards requirements.

What measures does the Ministry put in place to ensure access to education for children living in areas where no schools are available?

The distance learning process in educational institutions in the combat area, temporarily occupied territories, etc. shall be organized by the order (instruction) issued by the founder of the educational institution as agreed with the head of the military administration.

All children forced to change their place of study and/or residence or residing in the temporarily occupied territories may continue their education in general secondary education institutions remotely or externally in the territory free of hostilities.

Officials have been appointed in each region and the city of Kyiv to help children and their parents choose a general secondary education institution to continue education.

Students residing in the temporarily occupied territory can also apply to the State Lyceum "International Ukrainian School" of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine partners in certain countries to enroll children in school as external students, or directly to the State Lyceum "International Ukrainian School" for enrollment as external students and obtaining a certificate of education in the future.

For the sake of care for the participants of the educational process and parents of students who are in the temporarily occupied territories, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has taken the measures to ensure the right of children to education guaranteed by the Constitution of

Ukraine. If a child is in the temporarily occupied territory, to continue their education according to the Ukrainian programs and obtaining the Ukrainian certificate of education in the future, they can:

- continue studying and get the government-issued education certificate in the educational institution where they studied before the military aggression, provided that the educational process follows the Ukrainian state standards and curricula;
- apply for admission to any general secondary education in the safe territory of Ukraine (the education authorities provide assistance in finding an institution);
- if Internet access is available, it is possible to enroll in any Ukrainian licensed distance school online;
- choose homeschooling in an educational institution on the territory controlled by Ukraine or in the institution where they studied before the armed aggression, provided that this institution meets the state standards of Ukraine;
- in order to obtain educational certificates, they can study as external students and pass an annual examination in any general secondary education institution on the government-controlled territory of Ukraine (in case this educational institution provides such an educational service).

As of 11.21.2022, 166,041 students from among internally displaced persons are enrolled in Ukrainian general secondary education institutions.

1,044 institutions are in temporarily occupied territory.

At the same time, 1,230 general secondary education institutions in the Ukraine-controlled territory provide educational services to more than 94 thousand students from the temporarily occupied territories.

What measures does the Ministry take, where necessary in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, regional and local administrations, to provide psychosocial aid to schoolchildren and teachers, especially to those directly affected by the war?

20,413 professional psychologists are working in the Ukrainian education system, including 13,486 school psychologists, 6,553 social teachers, and 374 education coordinators.

Since the beginning of Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, there have been many requests for psychological support needed for children in war, for psychological assistance, including the emergency one, in overcoming stress, loss, grief, sorrow and suffering, for psychotherapeutic work with children who lost their parents, home, health and were injured, survived bombing, became refugees, and with internally displaced persons.

Under martial law, requests to provide psychosocial and socio-educational assistance to children and families of internally displaced persons predominate.

In the 2021/2022 academic year (since February 24, 2022), we received 221,664 requests of this kind, where 44% were from children and their family members; 6.7% were from teachers; 4.1% were from people with limited mobility (people with disabilities and the elderly people).

The total number of requests made to psychologists to provide psychosocial, social and educational aid to affected children and families during the hostilities in Ukraine is 446,368, where 54.5% were from children; 24.2% were from parents or legal representatives; 2.5% were from other family members; 17.2% were from educators; 1.6% were from people with low mobility.

Annex VI: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Ministry for Communications and Territorial Development, November 10, 2022

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: +1-212-290-4700
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

Tirana Hassan, Executive Director (Acting)
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Marie Warburg
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Masa Yanagisawa
Andrew Zolli

November 10, 2022

Vasyl Lozynskii
Acting Minister
Ministry for Communities and Territories
Development
Velyka Zhytomyrska st., 9
Kyiv, Ukraine 01601



HRW.org

CC: Serhiy Shkarlet, Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine

Dear Mr Lozynskii,

Human Rights Watch is conducting research on attacks on schools in Kharkivska, Chernihivska, and Kyivska regions. We are documenting the impacts of damage and destruction of schools during the war on the right to education. We are reaching out to your ministry to seek information about this issue.

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization whose work involves investigating and documenting human rights abuses in over 100 countries and supporting efforts to ensure that those most responsible for serious abuses are held to account. We have conducted extensive research on human rights and laws of war violations since Russia's war with Ukraine first began in 2014.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, we have had a team of researchers present in Ukraine. We have published [dozens of reports and other publications](#), including on the siege of Mariupol; unlawful ground and airstrikes targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure in numerous locations; Russia's use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions and antipersonnel mines; abuses against prisoners of war; summary executions, torture, enforced disappearances, and unlawful detention of civilians by Russian forces during their occupation of areas of Kyivska, Chernihivska, Kharkivska, Khersonska, and Zaporizska regions; the abusive and punitive "filtration" screening process;

and the crime of forcibly transferring Ukrainian civilians to Russia, among other topics.

We hope that this documentation will serve an important foundation for accountability efforts.

We are grateful for the ministry's full cooperation during the preparation of our 2016 [report](#) on attacks on schools in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We acknowledge the important step taken by the Ukrainian government in 2019 to sign the Safe Schools Declaration, and the subsequent development of the National Plan on the Safe Schools Declaration, and establishment of the Interinstitutional Working Group on Safe Schools Declaration Implementation.

We would welcome your response to the following questions regarding our current research on attacks on schools, so that we may incorporate the Ukrainian government's information in our reporting.

- According to the latest figures of the ministry, how many schools in government-controlled areas in Ukraine have suffered damage since February 24, 2022? How many schools in areas under Russian occupation in Ukraine have suffered damage since February 24, 2022?
- Of those, how many are destroyed or damaged beyond repair?
- What steps is the ministry taking to repair and rebuild schools in government-controlled areas that have been damaged and destroyed?
- How many schools have been repaired to date and how much has the government already spent on reconstruction efforts of school facilities?
- What is your current estimate of the cost necessary to repair and reconstruct schools that have to date been damaged or destroyed?
- What was the total student enrollment, prior to February 2022, in the schools that have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair?
- In its repair and reconstruction of schools, what steps, if any, is the ministry taking to ensure accessibility of schools, including for children with physical, sensory, and other types of disabilities? How is it consulting with persons with disabilities in the repair and reconstruction of schools?
- What steps is the ministry taking to ensure that all children living in areas where there is no functioning school building can access education?
- What steps is the ministry taking, as necessary in coordination with Ukraine's Ministry of Social Policy and regional and local administrations, to provide psychosocial support services to schoolchildren and teachers, particularly those with direct experience of the war?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to sharing our key findings with you in person in Kyiv, in advance of publication.

I would be grateful to receive your responses to the questions in this letter by December 5, 2022, to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Hugh Williamson
Director
Europe and Central Asia division
Human Rights Watch

Annex VII: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Russian Ministry of Defense, September 22, 2023

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: +1-212-290-4700
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

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September 22, 2023

Sergei Shoigu
Minister of Defense
Russian Federation
119160, Moscow, Frunzenskaya Embankment, 22/2
press@mil.ru



HRW.org

Re: Attacks on schools in Ukraine

Dear Minister Shoigu,

Human Rights Watch is conducting research on attacks on schools in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to document the damage and destruction of schools during the war and their impact on the right to education. An important part of this issue relates to military use of schools. We are reaching out to your ministry to seek information about this issue.

As you may know, Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization whose work involves investigating and documenting human rights violations in over 100 countries and supporting efforts to ensure that those most responsible for serious abuses are held to account. We have conducted extensive research on human rights and laws of war violations in Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2014.

In context of our work in Ukraine, in 2016 we published a report documenting attacks on schools and military use of schools by Russian and Ukrainian forces and urged both Russia and Ukraine to join the Safe Schools Declaration, an intergovernmental political commitment to reduce the likelihood that students, teachers, and schools are targeted for attack during armed conflict. Russia has not endorsed this declaration, which is currently endorsed by 118 countries, including Ukraine.

In the course of our work in Ukraine over the past 18 months, we have documented Russian forces' military use of schools and kindergartens in the Kyivska, Chernihivska, and Kharkivska regions, during which they damaged, destroyed, and looted movable school property, including furniture, computers, televisions, and other equipment. We have also documented damage these forces caused to school and kindergarten interiors. We also, Russian forces [illegally detaining](#) civilians who [reported](#) being tortured and otherwise ill-treated in schools.

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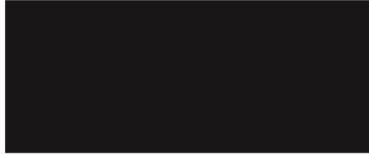
In addition, we have documented Russian forces' attacks on schools and kindergartens in the Kyivska, Chernihivska, and Kharkivska regions with munitions resulting in significant damage and destruction, including in some cases damage beyond repair.

We have also identified instances in which Ukrainian forces attacked schools occupied by Russian forces and several instances in which Ukrainian forces used schools for military purposes. We would welcome your response to the following questions regarding our current research on attacks on and military use of schools, so that we may reflect the Russian government's information in our reporting.

1. What measures has the Russian Defense Ministry undertaken to ensure the safety of Ukrainian schools and schoolchildren during the armed conflict?
2. What instructions has the Russian Defense Ministry given to Russian forces and all other forces under their command regarding the military use of schools?
3. What schools in Ukraine have been used by Russian forces since February 24, 2022? Please provide the number of instances, and when and where they occurred?
4. Is the Russian Defense Ministry aware of schools in Ukraine that have been used by Ukrainian forces since February 24, 2022? Please provide the number of instances, and when and where this occurred?
5. What measures has the Russian Defense Ministry taken to investigate alleged looting, defacement, and other willful destruction of school property by Russian forces in Ukraine and to hold accountable those responsible?
6. In areas under Russian forces' effective control or occupation, does the Defense Ministry examine the condition of schools when vacated by Russian forces? By Ukrainian forces? For example, do you examine for contamination by landmines, unexploded cluster munitions, or other explosive remnants of war left behind in school buildings and yards? Has the ministry examined the damage to school property from the use of schools? Are there examples of damage to school property that the ministry is aware of from such use by the Russian military since February 24, 2022?
7. Is there a procedure by which Russian forces, when they consider using a school for military purposes, consider alternative options for deployment that avoid the use of schools? Please provide examples of this.
8. In instances in which Russian forces use schools for military purposes, describe the procedure they follow to protect civilians from resulting military operations in the vicinity of such schools? Please provide examples of this.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I would be grateful to receive your responses to the questions in this letter by October 6 to [REDACTED] in order to allow us to reflect the response in our report.

Sincerely,



Hugh Williamson
Director
Europe and Central Asia division



“Tanks On the Playground”

Attacks on Schools and Military Use of Schools in Ukraine

Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine since February 2022 has devastated schools and kindergartens throughout the country. The impact on Ukrainian children’s access to education has been horrendous.

“*Tanks on the Playground*” documents the damage and destruction to schools in four regions of Ukraine largely as a result of Russian forces’ use of schools and kindergartens and their attacks on educational facilities. Russian forces also frequently looted and pillaged the schools they occupied, which are war crimes.

The report describes a few cases in which Ukrainian forces deploying in schools were attacked. It looks at steps Ukraine’s military took to prevent schools from coming under attack and measures by the authorities to ensure children could safely continue their education.

Concerned governments should press Russia to immediately cease indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects in Ukraine, including schools, and urge Russia to refrain from using educational facilities for military purposes.

Ukraine’s military should further limit as feasible its forces’ use of educational facilities. The international community should continue to support the Ukrainian government’s efforts to repair and rebuild schools and provide equitable access to remote learning.

(above) The town kindergarten in Novyi Bykiv, Chernihivska region, Ukraine, June 25, 2022. Russian forces encamped in the kindergarten for two weeks from late February to early March 2022.

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(front cover) The destroyed playground of a kindergarten in the town of Kupiansk, Kharkivska region, Ukraine, May 26, 2023.

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