

THE IMPACT OF WAR ON CHILDREN IN UKRAINE: CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE

In this newsletter, we address the profound and far-reaching effects of the war in Ukraine on its youngest and most vulnerable population—children. Since the conflict began, millions of children have faced unimaginable challenges, from displacement and loss of loved ones to disruptions in education and healthcare. Beyond the immediate impact, the war has left scars on their mental, physical, and emotional well-being, affecting their growth, safety, and future.

This issue focuses on understanding the multidimensional challenges faced by children in Ukraine, exploring the following critical areas:

- The psychological toll of war and the mental health challenges children face based on their age, gender, and displacement status.
- How the war has disrupted children’s education and the innovative methods introduced to ensure learning continues.
- The physical health concerns and barriers to healthcare access experienced by children in conflict zones.
- The consequences of displacement and family separation, including its impact on children’s emotional development and social support systems.
- The effects of violence and trauma on children’s behavioral and emotional well-being.
- Food insecurity and malnutrition caused by disrupted supply chains and limited agricultural activity.
- The increased risks to child

The Impact of War on Children in Ukraine

NEW YORK/KYIV, 18 November 2024 – Since the escalation of conflict in Ukraine nearly 1,000 days ago, over 2,400 children have been killed or injured, based on the latest verified data. Among these casualties, 659 children have lost their lives, while 1,747 have been wounded — equating to an average of 16 child casualties per week.

The devastating toll on children was underscored by a recent tragedy in Kryvyi Rih, where a mother and her three children, including a two-month-old baby, were killed during an airstrike on a residential building. In eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, children continue to face the harsh realities of over a decade of conflict.

Children are enduring constant violence, prolonged displacement, and severe shortages of essential resources like safe water, electricity, and heating. According to UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell, "Escalating attacks on Ukrainian territory since July have significantly increased civilian and infrastructure damage. Children have been killed in their beds, hospitals, and playgrounds, leaving families devastated and young lives irreparably altered."

Critical Infrastructure and Resource Shortages

Attacks on vital infrastructure have severely disrupted essential services. Between March and August 2024, strikes destroyed nine gigawatts of electricity generation capacity—half of what Ukraine requires during winter. Millions of children now face frigid conditions without heating, safe drinking water, or adequate sanitation.

Around 1.7 million children lack access to clean water, while 3.4 million do not have centralized sanitation, increasing the risk of disease as temperatures plummet. Furthermore, targeted attacks have left nearly 1,500 schools and over 650 healthcare facilities damaged or destroyed, affecting access to education and medical care.

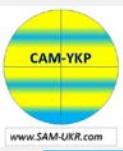
Displacement and Ongoing Risks

Since August 2024, approximately 170,000 people have fled intense fighting in eastern Ukraine, adding to the 3.6 million displaced within the country and 6.75 million who have sought refuge abroad. Women and children make up 90% of refugees in Europe, further highlighting the vulnerability of these groups.

Children in frontline regions spend hours each day sheltering from airstrikes, while many live-in basements under constant air raid alerts. Catherine Russell stressed, "Without sustained support, the psychological scars of this conflict will impact children for generations."

UNICEF’s Response and Funding Needs

UNICEF and its partners are working tirelessly to provide emergency healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and essential supplies to those in need. However, their 2024 humanitarian appeal of \$633.6 million remains underfunded by 30%, jeopardizing these critical efforts.



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Challenges: Children in Ukraine are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These challenges vary by age, with younger children exhibiting separation anxiety and adolescents showing signs of severe stress. Gender differences are also noted, as boys often externalize stress through aggression, while girls may internalize it, leading to withdrawal. Internally displaced children show higher rates of distress compared to their non-displaced peers.

Since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, countless civilians have been killed, and millions of children and families have been forced to live under constant attack or flee their homes, leaving behind their lives. The mental health impact on war-affected children and adolescents is significant but not yet fully understood.

Even before the war, Ukrainian children faced high rates of abuse, neglect, and mental health challenges. A study by Karatzias et al. found that 18.5% of Ukrainian preschoolers and 14.2% of school-age children exhibited PTSD symptoms based on parent-reported data. However, the lack of self-reported data highlights the need for more comprehensive studies. Another study by Osokina et al. in war-affected regions of Ukraine showed that adolescents exposed to armed attacks or displacement had significantly higher rates of PTSD (5.3% vs. 1.2%), depression (7.5% vs. 2.9%), and anxiety (4.4% vs. 1.5%) compared to those in non-war regions.

Children of war. Influence on Health

Almost three years ago, the lives of millions of children in Ukraine were changed forever. Since then, countless children have experienced unimaginable hardships. Their homes, schools, and playgrounds have been destroyed by bombings. Many have lost loved ones to the violence or have been separated from their families while fleeing to safety. Access to basic needs such as healthcare and education has been severely disrupted.

Today, 2.9 million children in Ukraine are in desperate need of humanitarian aid. The psychological toll on children caused by the ongoing war cannot be overstated.

After 1,000 days of conflict, approximately 3.55 million people remain displaced within Ukraine, while another 6.75 million have sought refuge in other countries. Many families are at a breaking point, facing constant threats to their safety, health, and livelihoods.

In 2024, the intensity of air strikes across Ukraine has sharply increased, leading to a 40% rise in child casualties. Tragically, more children have been killed or injured in the first nine months of 2024 than during the entire year of 2023.

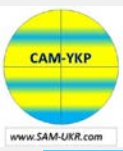
War is always a war against children. The ongoing conflict continues to deepen children's urgent needs for protection, mental health and psychological support, food, healthcare, education, clean water, and proper sanitation.

It is essential that children are shielded from harm at all times. Their safety and well-being must remain a global priority.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which began in 2014, escalated on February 24, 2022, with Russia's large-scale invasion. This has caused widespread destruction, loss of life, and the largest European refugee crisis since World War II, displacing nearly a third of Ukraine's population, including millions of children.

War and displacement deeply affect children's health, development, and mental well-being. Exposure to violence, loss, and instability increases their risk of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, with mental health closely tied to their families' emotional state.

This study examines the experiences of displaced Ukrainian children, focusing on trauma exposure, mental health challenges, and sociodemographic factors to inform interventions and ensure equitable support for all refugees.



EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

The war in Ukraine has deeply affected the mental health of children and adolescents, exposing them to trauma, anxiety, and depression. Violence, displacement, and family separation have increased risks of PTSD, disrupted education, and harmed emotional development. Long-term effects include cognitive delays and heightened anxiety.

Social support, mental health services, and psychological interventions like trauma-informed care are vital for fostering resilience and recovery. Reducing stigma, promoting acceptance, and providing safe spaces are crucial for helping young people heal.

Organizations like ICMC offer critical aid, including mental health services, emergency support, and training for trauma recognition. International cooperation and donations remain essential to protect and support the mental well-being of Ukraine's youth.

Exposure to violence and trauma significantly affects children's behavioral development, leading to various emotional and psychological challenges. Children who witness or experience violent events are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

These experiences can manifest in behaviors like increased aggression, difficulties in school, and challenges in forming healthy relationships.

Mental Health Impact:

- 1 in 5 children in Ukraine is estimated to require mental health support due to the ongoing conflict. (UNICEF)
- Over 75% of children in conflict zones report symptoms of anxiety and stress.

Displacement and Trauma:

- 3.7 million internally displaced people remain in Ukraine, many of whom are children who have experienced direct or indirect trauma due to violence, family separation, and displacement. (IOM)
- 70% of displaced families have been uprooted for over a year, increasing risks of long-term psychological distress.

Educational and Social Disruptions:

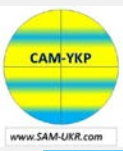
- Approximately 5 million children face disruptions in education, with many schools damaged or destroyed. Online platforms and creative programs have been introduced to support continuity but remain inaccessible to some. Creative Interventions:
- Art therapy and other creative programs are being widely used to help children cope with trauma. These initiatives have shown a significant reduction in symptoms of PTSD and anxiety, fostering resilience. (Institute of Psychology, Ukraine)

Support for Recovery:

International organizations like UNICEF and IOM are prioritizing mental health interventions and social support systems, aiming to reach 6.5 million individuals with essential services, including psychological aid.

These statistics emphasize the critical role of mental health services, community support, and educational initiatives in mitigating the impact of war on Ukraine's children and ensuring a path toward recovery and stability.

Understanding these impacts and supporting healthy coping strategies are crucial in mitigating the long-term effects of violence and trauma on children's development.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Recent Elections in Ukraine

Quality education is vital for Ukraine's future, but the war and shift to remote learning have severely impacted the education system. Schools have been destroyed, children evacuated, and learning disrupted, leading to significant losses beyond academics—such as reduced motivation, psychological stress, socialization challenges, and a lack of critical life skills.

Despite these challenges, preserving and improving education remains essential for sustainable development. Both the government and nonprofits are stepping in with solutions, from individual tutoring to large-scale support for schools and teachers. Organizations like Teach for Ukraine, Pro.Svit, Smart Osvita, savED.Foundation, and Re:Osvita are actively working to rebuild and strengthen Ukraine's education system.

The war in Ukraine has severely disrupted children's access to formal education. Many schools have been destroyed or damaged, and large-scale evacuations have displaced millions of children, making traditional schooling inaccessible for many. Constant threats of shelling and unsafe conditions have further limited students' ability to attend in-person classes.

Access to Education

To address these challenges, alternative learning methods have been implemented, including:

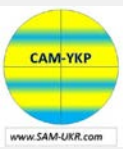
- Remote Learning: Online platforms and virtual classrooms have become the primary means of education, although access to technology and reliable internet remains uneven.
- Hybrid Learning Models: Combining in-person and online instruction in safer regions to accommodate displaced students.
- Mobile Schools: Initiatives that bring education directly to children in shelters and refugee areas.
- One-on-One Tutoring: Support for children who need personalized help due to learning losses or psychological challenges.
- Community-Based Programs: Nonprofits and local organizations providing resources, such as teaching materials, laptops, and psychological support, to ensure continued learning.

These efforts aim to minimize disruptions and ensure that education remains accessible, even amidst ongoing challenges.

Education in wartime Ukraine is marked by resilience. Schools have been heavily damaged by bombs and shelling, turning classrooms into rubble. Before the war, children enjoyed carefree routines, but since 2022, air raid sirens and constant anxiety have disrupted their lives.

For students like 13-year-old Yanina from Lviv, frequent air raid alerts make focusing on studies difficult. Attending school in person, with access to safe bomb shelters, is often more stable than remote learning, which is hindered by power outages.

Children carry emergency bags and soft toys, calmly moving to shelters during alerts, where they engage in activities to cope with the stress. Safe shelters within schools are vital for continuing education amidst the ongoing conflict.



DISPLACEMENT AND FAMILY SEPARATION

Humanitarian problems

About three years since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the country is facing the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since WWII. More than 14 million people, including refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), have fled their homes. Intense fighting continues, with widespread destruction, civilian casualties, and significant challenges in delivering humanitarian aid, especially in frontline areas. The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023 exacerbated flooding, property damage, and displacement, impacting the economy and agricultural sectors.

Over 14.6 million people in Ukraine need humanitarian assistance, and the war has severely disrupted access to essential services like education, healthcare, and water. As of December 2023, around 3.7 million people remain internally displaced, and 5.9 million refugees have sought safety in neighboring countries. These conditions have led to increased protection risks and mental health challenges.

Despite challenges, neighboring countries have shown solidarity, though changes in protection schemes have created difficulties for refugees, particularly with shelter and financial support. As of October 2023, most refugees plan to stay in their host countries, with a smaller number considering relocation or returning to Ukraine.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been actively involved, with over 1,900 staff members working in Ukraine and neighboring countries. IOM has mobilized 63% of its funding needs and reached over 6.5 million people by December 2023. While the situation remains dire, IOM continues to support long-term solutions and remains committed to helping Ukraine's people rebuild toward a more stable future.

Public perception of government services varies by sector.

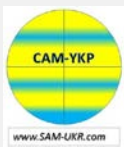
Displacement and family separation have profound short-term and long-term effects on the social and emotional development of children in Ukraine. These impacts affect not only the children themselves but also their family dynamics and support networks.

Short-Term Effects:

- 1. Emotional Trauma:** The immediate emotional impact of displacement, including fear, anxiety, and grief, can overwhelm children. Separation from familiar surroundings, friends, and sometimes family members can lead to confusion and a sense of loss.
- 2. Disrupted Attachment:** Separation from parents or primary caregivers disrupts attachment bonds, which are crucial for children's emotional security. This can cause stress and feelings of abandonment or insecurity.
- 3. Increased Vulnerability:** Displaced children often face increased vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and neglect, especially in overcrowded shelters or temporary accommodations. Their sense of safety is compromised, leading to heightened stress and difficulty in forming new support relationships.
- 4. Loss of Routine:** The upheaval of daily life and displacement disrupts children's routines, making it difficult for them to focus on education or maintain any semblance of normalcy. This loss of stability impacts their emotional well-being.

Changes in Family Dynamics:

- Parental Stress:** Parents, already under significant stress due to displacement, may struggle to meet the emotional and psychological needs of their children. This can strain family relationships, causing additional emotional strain for both parents and children.
- Loss of Extended Support Networks:** Displaced families often lose access to extended family members and close community networks, which can serve as crucial sources of support. This loss can contribute to feelings of isolation and lack of social cohesion.



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION:

Food security

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has significantly compromised children's food security and nutritional well-being through several interrelated factors:

Disruptions in Agricultural Activities and Supply Chains

The war has severely disrupted Ukraine's agrifood sector, a critical component of both national and global food supplies. Damage to essential infrastructure has hindered agricultural production and the transportation of food to markets. This disruption has led to decreased food availability and increased prices, exacerbating food insecurity among the population, including children.

Impact on Food Assistance Programs

The conflict has also affected the delivery of food assistance programs. The destruction of infrastructure and the presence of landmines have made it challenging to reach vulnerable populations, including children, with necessary aid. This has further compromised the nutritional status of children, increasing the risk of malnutrition

Food Security

The war in Ukraine has significantly disrupted both national and global food supplies, particularly impacting key agricultural exports like wheat, maize, and oilseeds. As these essential staples face supply risks due to the conflict, this paper explores the situation and offers an analysis of potential measures to alleviate the effects of the war on food security and achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). This includes ending hunger, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. To understand the key research areas related to food security in war contexts, the authors conducted a bibliometric literature review, using co-occurrence analysis of 631 peer-reviewed articles from the Scopus database. Additionally, ten case studies were selected to examine how the war in Ukraine specifically affects food insecurity. The bibliometric analysis revealed four main thematic clusters, which were then assessed in terms of how the war influences food security, its causes, and potential solutions. The paper concludes with policy recommendations and theoretical insights for addressing food security issues in conflict zones, with a focus on Ukraine.

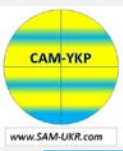
Economic Consequences

The economic impact of the war, including inflation and reduced household incomes, has limited families' ability to purchase sufficient and nutritious food. This economic strain has forced many households to reduce their food consumption, adversely affecting children's nutritional intake and overall health.

Global Implications

Ukraine's role as a major exporter of wheat, maize, and oilseeds means that disruptions in its agricultural sector have global repercussions. The resulting increase in global food prices further threatens food security for children worldwide, particularly in regions heavily reliant on these imports.

In summary, the war in Ukraine has profoundly affected children's food security and nutritional status through disrupted agricultural activities, compromised food assistance programs, and economic hardships. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to restore agricultural production, ensure the safe delivery of food assistance, and support economic stability to protect the well-being of children in Ukraine and beyond.



SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY BONDS

Impact on Social Integration and Community Bonds

Disruption of Education: The war has forced many children to flee their homes, resulting in interruptions to their education. In occupied regions, Russian authorities have imposed their curriculum, replacing Ukrainian literature and history, which alienates children from their cultural identity and community ties.

At 8 a.m. on February 24, 2022, Russian troops encircled the outskirts of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city and the capital of Kharkivska region. Although Kharkiv itself was never captured, Russian forces controlled approximately 8,500 square kilometers, or one-third of the region, for six months. This area was home to 260,000 primary and secondary school students prior to the invasion. During their occupation, Russian authorities replaced the Ukrainian education system with the Russian curriculum, taught exclusively in Russian. By September and October 2022, Ukrainian forces liberated much of the region, leaving 223,000 students to return to areas previously under occupation.

Impact on children

In addition to Kharkivska, Russian forces occupied parts of Khersonska, Zaporizka, Donetsk, and Luhanska regions, systematically imposing their education system and banning Ukrainian instruction. This violates international law, including the laws of armed conflict and international human rights law.

According to estimates by Ukrainian experts, over one million school-age children currently live in Russian-occupied territories, including 458,000 in Crimea alone. Despite the occupation, 62,400 children in these areas continue their studies through Ukraine's secondary education system via remote learning, as reported by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science.

The report highlights violations in education by Russian occupation authorities, particularly in de-occupied areas of Kharkivska and in currently occupied parts of Khersonska, Zaporizka, Donetsk, and Luhanska regions. Research conducted in Kharkivska after liberation, along with interviews from displaced teachers, sheds light on the scale of these violations.

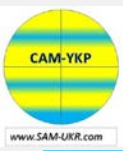
The Ukrainian government has also faced scrutiny for its response to educational staff in occupied areas. Measures such as criminal prosecution, administrative sanctions, and mandatory security screenings (referred to as "filtration") have been used against educators accused of collaboration with occupying forces.

The invasion has further strained Ukraine's education system, with significant barriers to online learning, a growing demand for mental health support for both students and teachers, and additional challenges for students with disabilities. These pressures underscore the extensive impact of Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine's education system.

Psychological Trauma: Continuous exposure to conflict-related stressors, such as air raid sirens and instability, has adversely affected children's mental health. This trauma hampers their ability to form and maintain relationships within their communities.

Immediate Psychological Distress and Stress Responses in Children

Children exposed to war and displacement display a wide range of distress reactions, including fears, dependency, prolonged crying, disinterest in surroundings, psychosomatic symptoms, and aggressive behavior. A child's subjective perception and interpretation of these experiences play a critical role in shaping their responses, which can vary significantly between individuals. Reactions also depend on their developmental stage and social-emotional context.



IMPACT ON GIRLS VS. BOYS

The distinct gendered impacts of the war on children in Ukraine

A new study, co-authored by World Vision and the NGO “Girls,” explores the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on adolescent girls and boys in Ukraine amidst the ongoing conflict. The findings highlight that girls are more likely to recognize the different forms of GBV and are more vulnerable to psychological violence compared to boys.

Key findings from the study include:

Almost half (49%) of the respondents identified adolescent girls as the most vulnerable group to GBV, citing their limited autonomy and social stigma as key factors increasing their exposure to violence.

The psychological impact of GBV is more profound for girls, with many experiencing a loss of self-confidence and confusion. Two in five girls (37% and 39%) who have encountered GBV report these feelings, compared to one in four boys (24% and 26%).

Adolescent boys tend to associate GBV with physical violence and issues around control and gender dynamics. However, they find it more challenging to understand the underlying causes of GBV compared to girls (35% of boys struggle with this, versus 25% of girls).

Adolescents living in conflict-affected areas, including internally displaced boys and girls who have returned home, recognize the gendered impacts of the war.

Girls are less likely to seek help for GBV due to stigma, with 81% of adolescents reporting they did not ask for help after experiencing psychological violence. Girls, in particular, are less likely to reach out for support compared to boys.

Impact on girls vs. boys

The adolescents, especially girls, are among the most vulnerable to GBV in times of crisis, conflict, and displacement. Despite their heightened vulnerability, children and young people are often neglected in GBV research, policy, and programming. This gap hampers the development of effective GBV prevention strategies tailored to the needs of adolescents, particularly girls.

Arman Grigoryan, Response Director at World Vision Ukraine Crisis Response, emphasized that gender-based violence is a tragic reality for many adolescent girls in Ukraine, worsened by the ongoing conflict. He stressed the importance of creating systems that protect and empower young people and providing support to both girls and boys.

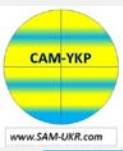
Yuliya Sporysh, founder of NGO “Girls,” highlighted the need for safe spaces for girls in Ukraine and emphasized that GBV prevention efforts must be integrated into both formal and informal education to better protect and empower girls, involving parents, teachers, and child protection experts in these initiatives.

Resilience and Coping Strategies of Children in Ukraine During the War

Children in Ukraine have displayed remarkable resilience in navigating the challenges of war. Their ability to adapt and cope is shaped by a combination of individual and community-based strategies. Below are some key coping mechanisms and suggestions for further support

The war in Ukraine has unearthed deep-seated trauma while continuously adding new layers, intensifying stress, anxiety, and suffering. Sociological research shows that over 90% of Ukrainians now experience at least one symptom of an anxiety disorder, with 57% at risk of developing mental health conditions. This risk is particularly high among young people aged 18 to 30, as they are the ones most affected—whether serving on the frontlines or as young partners, mothers, and widows coping with loss and uncertainty.

Returning soldiers and civilians enduring repeated bombardments may carry both visible and invisible wounds that take years to heal. In these challenging times, families and communities must come together to offer support. Young Ukrainians urgently need better resources and strategies to cope with the ongoing war and its profound impact on their future. Innovative and practical approaches to resilience are essential.



CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFETY

Children remain among the most vulnerable

August 15, 2024

As the war in Ukraine continues to devastate communities, children remain among the most vulnerable, facing critical threats such as violence, family separation, and serious mental health challenges. Our July 2024 Child Protection Assessment sheds light on these pressing concerns, with a focus on the South-Eastern macro-region, including Kharkivska, Donetsk, and Zaporizka oblasts. The assessment highlights three key risks to children’s safety: bombing and shelling (73%), family separation (36%), and substance abuse among children (16%). Additionally, the protracted conflict has had a profound impact on children’s mental health.

While urban centers may offer comparatively better access to child protection services, rural and war-affected areas face significant challenges. These challenges include a lack of mental health support, a shortage of trained child protection staff, and an absence of safe spaces for children. Access to these services is further hindered by safety concerns during travel and long waiting times.

Although communities are generally aware of child protection risks and children’s rights, 34% of households expressed a need for more information on existing risks, available child protection services, and how to access them.

Child protection

The conflict in Ukraine has displaced millions, including **around half who are children**, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. These children face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse, including **human trafficking, forced labor, and smuggling**, as well as exposure to gender-based violence, especially for women and girls.

Displaced children often lack access to **safe routes, medical care, food, and clean water**, increasing their vulnerability. Those in institutional care—approximately **100,000 children**, half with disabilities—are particularly at risk. While efforts are made to relocate them to safer areas or neighboring countries, it’s crucial to prioritize **family reunification** and obtain parental or guardian consent. **Relocation should never lead to family separation.**

UNICEF and humanitarian organizations are working to provide essential protection and support to displaced children and their families, both inside and outside Ukraine.

For further inquiries, insights, or collaboration opportunities, please visit our website or reach out directly:

 www.sam-ukr.com