

220,000 children threatened by mines in Ukraine's east: UN

December 21 2017

Hundreds of thousands of children are at imminent risk of being hit by mines and other explosive weapons in war-torn eastern Ukraine, one of the most mine-contaminated places on earth, a UN report said Thursday.

A bloody conflict between Ukraine's army and Russian-backed rebels has endangered 220,000 children who live, play and go to and from school in areas littered with landmines and other deadly explosive devices, the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) said.

"It is unacceptable that places where children could safely play less than four years ago are now riddled with deadly explosives," said Giovanna Barberis, the agency's Ukraine representative.

"All parties to the conflict must immediately end the use of these gruesome weapons that have contaminated communities and put [children](#) in constant danger of injury and death."

Available data from January to November showed on average one conflict-related child casualty a week along eastern Ukraine's front line—a 500 kilometre strip of land that divides warring sides and where fighting is most severe, the report said.

Landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance were the leading cause of these child casualties, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all recorded injuries and deaths during the period,

UNICEF reported.

The agency warned that the explosive weapons also put at risk vital infrastructure such as water, electricity and gas facilities.

UNICEF urged all sides of the conflict to recommit to the ceasefire agreement and allow mine clearance activities and recovery efforts to begin.

More than 10,000 people have died and almost 24,000 have been injured since the pro-Russian insurgency began in April 2014.

Ukraine and its Western allies accuse Russia of funnelling troops and arms across the border to fan the flames of the [conflict](#).

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Citation: 220,000 children threatened by mines in Ukraine's east: UN (2017, December 21)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-children-threatened-ukraine-east.html>

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