

Deadly war weapons endanger lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine – UNICEF

21 December 2017 – Landmines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war threaten the lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine, the United Nations Children’s Fund has warned, calling on all parties to the conflict to immediately end the use of the lethal weapons and allow mine clearance activities to begin.

“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 head of UNICEF operations in the country, in a news release Thursday.

“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,” she added.

According to UNICEF, a child has become a conflict-related casualty every week, on average, between January and November this year along eastern Ukraine’s contact line – a 500-kilometre strip of land dividing Government and non-government controlled areas, where fighting is most severe.

Landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance were the leading cause of these tragedies, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all recorded injuries and deaths during the period. In most cases the casualties occurred when children picked up explosives such as hand grenades and fuses.

I picked it up and I think I pressed something, and it just exploded. There was a lot of blood...Aleksey, a 14-year-old boy

Many more children have been left with lifelong disabilities.

Aleksey, a 14-year-old boy, badly injured in one such incident recently told UNICEF: “I picked it up and I think I pressed something, and it just exploded. There was a lot of blood and the fingers were hanging. I was so scared that I started shaking. I almost collapsed.”

In an effort to make children aware of the dangers, UNICEF and partners have been conducting mine risk education programmes since 2015, reaching over 500,000 children across the region. The UN agency has also provided psychosocial support to 270,000 children affected by the ongoing conflict.

However, persisting funding gaps have severely hampered the response.

With just mere days left in the year, UNICEF's emergency appeal to support children and their families in eastern Ukraine is only 46 per cent funded, while its child protection programmes including mine risk education and providing psychosocial support for children has an even larger funding gap of 73 per cent.