

# THEMATIC REPORT

THE IMPACT OF MINES, UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE AND OTHER  
EXPLOSIVE OBJECTS ON CIVILIANS IN THE CONFLICT-  
AFFECTED REGIONS OF EASTERN UKRAINE

November 2019 – March 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a follow-up to the Mission's December 2019 report on the [impact of mines, unexploded ordnance \(UXO\) and other explosive objects on civilians in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine](#). It covers the period from November 2019 to March 2021 and highlights the dangers these objects pose to civilians.

During the reporting period, the Mission corroborated 76 civilian casualties (20 killed and 56 injured) due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects. Over 85 per cent of those injured or killed were men (56) and boys (9); the remainder was comprised of ten women and one girl.

Civilians have been killed and injured by mines, UXO and other explosive devices while going about their daily lives. More than half of the casualties (44) confirmed and documented by the Mission during the reporting period have been cases where civilians have found ammunition, grenades or UXO and have detonated them while mishandling or dismantling them, including to extract parts to sell for scrap metal while trying to earn a living.

In 2020, for the first time since the Mission began systematically tracking civilian casualties, mines, UXO and other explosive objects became the main cause of death and injury of civilians in conflict-affected areas, albeit by a small margin – 68 casualties, in contrast to 66 casualties due to shelling and small-arms fire. The turning point was the enforcement, on 27 July 2020, of the Measures to strengthen the ceasefire, agreed within the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on 22 July 2020. Between 27 July and 31 December 2020, the Mission confirmed three civilian casualties due to shelling and small-arms fire, in contrast to 37 civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects.

While commitments to the ceasefire can help ensure that there is a decrease in violence, the danger posed to civilians remains. Despite the commitments to take measures to minimize the indiscriminate and persistent effects of landmines, and their undertakings to refrain from the use of anti-personnel mines, the Mission has observed over 34,000 mines on both sides of the contact line and Ukraine remains one of the most heavily mine-contaminated countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> Further action is needed to respond to the long-term consequences of the contamination of land by mines, UXO and other explosive objects. Between January and March 2021, the Mission confirmed seven civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects while four were due to small-arms fire.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., UN OCHA, [Landmines still pose threat to two million Ukrainians](#), (5 April 2021).

## Key figures

### *Civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects*

- Total: 76 civilian casualties
- Killed: 20 (16 men, two women, one boy and one girl)
- Injured: 56 (40 men, eight women, and eight boys)

### *Civilian casualties by region and control*

- Donetsk region: 12 in government-controlled areas and 19 in non-government-controlled areas
- Luhansk region: nine in government-controlled areas and 36 in non-government-controlled areas

### *Presence of mines*

During the reporting period, the Mission spotted nearly 20,000 mines on both sides of the contact line (of which about 1,600 were observed for the first time)

- Donetsk region: nearly 12,500 (5,700 in government-controlled areas and 6,750 in non-government-controlled areas)
- Luhansk region: about 7,200 (2,400 in government-controlled areas and 4,800 in non-government-controlled areas)

*\*The SMM was not able to ascertain whether or not these 1,600 mines were recently laid.*

The presence of mines, UXO, and other explosive objects also continues to affect people's everyday lives in eastern Ukraine – their freedom of movement, access to services, education, health, land and economic opportunities. Civilians in settlements along the contact line have been unable to visit the graves of their relatives in safety, as many cemeteries along the contact line are contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects. During the reporting period, in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the SMM has facilitated and monitored adherence to localized ceasefires for the inspection and demining of 44 cemeteries in 27 settlements in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The signatories of the Memorandum *On the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group* of 19 September 2014 should adhere to their commitments in Article 6 of the Memorandum to prohibit the installation or laying of mines in a 30km-wide security zone around the contact line, and to remove existing mines from the area.

Similarly, the commitments made in the 3 March 2016 TCG Decision on Mine Action to refrain from laying new mines and to map, mark and fence off contaminated areas in twelve priority areas, mainly encompassing civilian infrastructure sites, should be implemented. The sides should adopt and implement the common understanding on mine action, reached in principle in

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<sup>2</sup> The SMM cannot confirm whether or not these areas are free of mines or UXO and explosive objects.

the TCG's Working Group on Security Issues, in line with the Common Agreed Conclusions of the 2019 Normandy Four Summit in Paris.

Areas presenting a risk to civilians should be marked, fenced off or cleared of these dangerous objects, both in co-ordination and unilaterally. Mine clearance is also a precondition for carrying out repairs or maintenance to vital civilian infrastructure sites that supply civilians with water, gas, electricity and access to telecommunication services. The sides should use the partial closures of the crossing points to initiate the regular inspection and clearance of these areas of mines, UXO and other explosive objects. Inspection and demining activities should continue even after the full opening of the crossing points. Similarly, the sides should use school holidays and periods of distance learning to inspect and clear the areas around educational facilities in order to protect children and school staff.

Considering the continued occurrence of civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects, mine-risk awareness and education programmes to mitigate the dangers posed by these objects need to be designed based on an understanding of the variety of ways civilians encounter them. While this report does not provide data on the way civilians involved in incidents with mines, UXO and other explosive objects and their families are affected as a result of these incidents, more effort is required to respond to the socio-economic, medical and psychosocial needs of injured civilians. Support also needs to be provided for caregivers who have to take on the additional responsibilities brought on by the change in dynamics due to the death or injury of family members.

# INTRODUCTION

In line with its mandate, the SMM consistently reports on the impact of mines, UXO and other explosive objects, such as grenades and ammunition, on the lives of civilians. Since 2016, the Mission has confirmed over 470 civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects.<sup>3</sup> These incidents profoundly impact the psychological, social and economic wellbeing of the victims, as well as of their families. The presence of such objects also continues to affect civilians' freedom of movement, access to services, education, health, land and economic opportunities. Many civilians cannot go to cemeteries along both sides of the contact line to mourn their deceased relatives, as they are contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects.

This report is a follow-up to the Mission's December 2019 report on the [impact of mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects on civilians in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine](#) and

covers the period between 1 November 2019 and 31 March 2021. It begins with a summary of the commitments made in relation to the removal of mines. It then provides an overview of the presence of mines, UXO and other explosive objects, and their impact on the life of civilians residing in conflict-affected areas, focusing on casualties, freedom of movement, the repair and maintenance of vital civilian infrastructure and access to educational facilities. The report concludes with an overview of the Mission's work in facilitating and monitoring localized ceasefires for mine action, and its mine-risk education activities.

The data presented in this report is based on direct observations made by the SMM's Monitoring Officers (MO) and accounts of civilians met during patrols, as well as on information gathered via the SMM's technical monitoring means, such as cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV).

## CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORK OF OBLIGATIONS AND MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Article 6 of the Memorandum of 19 September 2014 *On the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group*<sup>4</sup> references the prohibition of the installation or laying of mines in a 30km-wide security zone on both sides of the contact line. The article also obliges the signatories to remove existing mines from this area. In the Decision of the

TCG on Mine Action of 3 March 2016, its signatories agreed on a list of 12 priority areas to be cleared of mines, which they committed to mark, fence off and map, as well as on the need to facilitate the provision of mine-risk education to civilians. These priority areas mainly encompass civilian infrastructure sites.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cases where civilians have committed suicide or other cases of self-harm with weapons used in the armed conflict, as well as cases of domestic violence, are outside the scope of the SMM's definition of civilian casualties. During the reporting period the SMM has received several reports where explosive objects were used in alleged cases of domestic violence.

<sup>4</sup> Article 6 of the Memorandum On implementation of the provisions of the Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group, concerning steps aimed at the implementation of the Peace Plan of the president of Ukraine, P. Poroshenko, and the initiatives of the president of the Russian Federation, V. Putin: "Prohibition of the installation or laying of mines within the boundaries of the Safety Zone. All mines previously installed or laid in the Safety Zone must be removed."

<sup>5</sup> The 12 priority areas include: Vuhlehirsk TPS-Mykhailivka, Olenivka; Pivdennodonbasska; Horlivka Vuhlehirsk TPS Makiivka; Karbonit Water Supply Project: north of Pervomaisk; Krasnyi Lyman, north-east of Krasnyi Lyman Luhansk TPS-Yuvileina; Luhansk TPS-Mykhailivka; Maiorsk-Horlivka, Travneve; Hladosove; Zaitseve (Vuhlehirsk power station-Tsentralna #1); Travneve, Hladosove, Zaitseve (Vuhlehirsk power station-Tsentralna#2); Starobeshivske TES Azovske; and Yasynuvata-Avdivka platform.

In line with the Common Agreed Conclusions of the December 2019 Normandy Four Summit, which include an agreement to update the mine action plan, mine action has been regularly discussed in the TCG's Working Group on Security Issues (WGSII), with the Co-ordinator suggesting a focus on areas frequently used by civilians, particularly around crossing points between the government-controlled entry-exit checkpoints (EECP) and the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations, among other areas.<sup>6</sup> At the 22 April 2020 meeting of the TCG, participants exchanged information on the status of implementation of their respective updated mine action plans.<sup>7</sup> Since September 2020, the Chief Monitor of the SMM, in his capacity as the Co-ordinator of the WGSII, has suggested further discussions on an updated mine action plan. The TCG reached a common understanding on a Framework Decision on Mine Action, which included all five operational crossing points along the contact line (Maiorsk, Marinka, Novotroitske, Hnutove and Stanytsia Luhanska), as well as critical civilian infrastructure sites located near the contact line. Its final endorsement by the TCG is still pending.<sup>8</sup>

The Co-ordinator of the WGSII continued to urge the sides to take unilateral or co-ordinated steps, including outside of the framework of agreements made, to ensure that areas presenting a risk to civilians are marked, fenced off or cleared of these dangerous objects. This also includes the

provision of relevant security guarantees to support such works.

Mine action has consistently been on the agenda of the WGSII. The sides have demined some areas, on their respective side of the contact line, such as educational facilities and cemeteries (see *Chapter 7*).

### *Law on Mine Action in Ukraine*

On 17 September 2020, the Verkhovna Rada adopted law №. 911 amending the December 2018 law *Mine Action in Ukraine* (№. 2642). The amendments changed the system of authorities responsible for mine action, in particular two new bodies dealing with mine action activities: a Mine Action Centre which will be established under the Ministry of Defence, and a Humanitarian Demining Centre, which has already been established under the Ministry of Interior. The Mine Action Centre and the Humanitarian Demining Centre will share the responsibilities for planning and organizing demining activities, making proposals for the formation of state policy in mine action, informing the public about relevant steps in this area, and ensuring quality control of demining operations.

In the State budget for 2021, however, the funds for mine action activities totalling 5 million UAH (approximately 150,000 EUR) were only allocated under the budget line of the Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories for measures aimed at reducing the social, economic and environmental impact of explosives on the population and for mine risk awareness. The

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<sup>6</sup> There are five crossing points through which civilians can cross the contact line. Each crossing point consists of a government-controlled entry-exit checkpoint (EECP) and a corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations: the five crossing points are the pedestrian-only crossing point near Stanytsia Luhanska in Luhansk region, and the four vehicular and pedestrian crossing points near government-controlled Maiorsk and non-government-controlled Horlivka, government-controlled Marinka and non-government-controlled Kreminets, government-controlled Novotroitske and non-government controlled Olenivka, and government-controlled Hnutove and non-government-controlled Verkhnohyrokyvske, all in Donetsk region. In addition, there are two EECPs near government-controlled Zolote and Shchastia that are open for civilians; however, the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formation are not operational, so civilians cannot currently cross the contact line at these two crossing points.

<sup>7</sup> See Press Statement of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine after the regular [Meeting of Trilateral Contact Group on 22 April 2020](#). The statement also specified that mine clearance is conducted at EECPs and in their vicinity, as well as along frequently used roads, at cemeteries, near schools and other civilian facilities.

<sup>8</sup> See [Press Statement of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group \(TCG\) of 2 September 2020](#)



abovementioned centres will be created with available funds of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior.

The SMM is not aware of similar measures in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

## CHAPTER 2: PRESENCE OF MINES, UXO AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE OBJECTS IN EASTERN UKRAINE

On the occasion of International Mine Awareness Day (4 April), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs highlighted the threat posed by mines, UXO and other explosive objects to about two million civilians on both sides of the contact line in eastern Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence estimates that over 7,000km<sup>2</sup> of land in government-controlled areas and 8,000km<sup>2</sup> in non-government-controlled areas are contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects.<sup>10</sup>

During the reporting period, the SMM spotted nearly 20,000 mines on both sides of the contact line, of which about 1,600 were observed for the first time.<sup>11,12</sup> More than 70 per cent of these mines were observed in Donetsk region. Many of these mines, as well as UXO and other explosive objects, were observed along roads frequently used by civilians and the SMM, or in agricultural fields and near settlements. For example, in January 2020, the Mission spotted 45 anti-tank mines in a field east of road T-1316 leading to non-government-controlled Pervomaisk, Luhansk region. In August 2020, the SMM saw for the first time a mortar shell (82mm), assessed as a piece of UXO, on the edge of a road close to a checkpoint of the

armed formations, which is used regularly by civilians and the SMM, on the eastern edge of non-government-controlled Raivka, Luhansk region. In February 2021, an SMM mini-UAV spotted for the first time ten probable anti-tank mines laid across road T-0509, about 3.5km west of non-government-controlled Dokuchaievsk, Donetsk region, assessed as belonging to the armed formations. About 1.2km further west, and about 3.5km south-east of government-controlled Berezove, the same UAV also spotted 59 anti-tank mines laid across the same road, stretching north and southwards into fields, assessed as belonging to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

During the reporting period, on 107 occasions the Mission brought specific locations of mines and UXO, posing a danger to civilians, to the attention of the Ukrainian side of the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC), as well as to the attention of the armed formations in non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, asking for their removal.<sup>13,14</sup> For instance, in Luhansk region, the SMM submitted a request for the removal of mines or UXO along the road between government-controlled Zolote and non-government-controlled Pervomaisk, between government-

<sup>9</sup> UN OCHA, [Landmines still pose threat to two million Ukrainians](#), (5 April 2021)

<sup>10</sup> Information provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence, January 2019. (Available information from media during the reporting period confirmed that 7,000km<sup>2</sup> is contaminated in government-controlled areas; however, there is no publically available update on contaminated land in non-government-controlled areas.)

<sup>11</sup> The SMM was not able to ascertain whether or not these 1,600 mines were recently laid.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 20,000 mines, nearly 12,500 were in Donetsk region (5,700 in government-controlled areas and 6,750 in non-government-controlled areas), in Luhansk regions about 7,200 (2,400 in government-controlled areas and 4,800 in non-government-controlled areas).

<sup>13</sup> The JCCC was established in September 2014 by Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Each posted a representative to jointly head the Centre and a staff of officers from the Ukrainian and Russian Federation Armed Forces to be co-located in defined sectors of Luhansk and Donetsk regions. In December 2017, Russian Federation Armed Forces officers withdrew from the JCCC and departed Ukraine.

<sup>14</sup> Of the 107 requests, 64 were sent to the Ukrainian side of the JCCC, ten to the armed formations in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk region and 33 to the armed formations in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region.

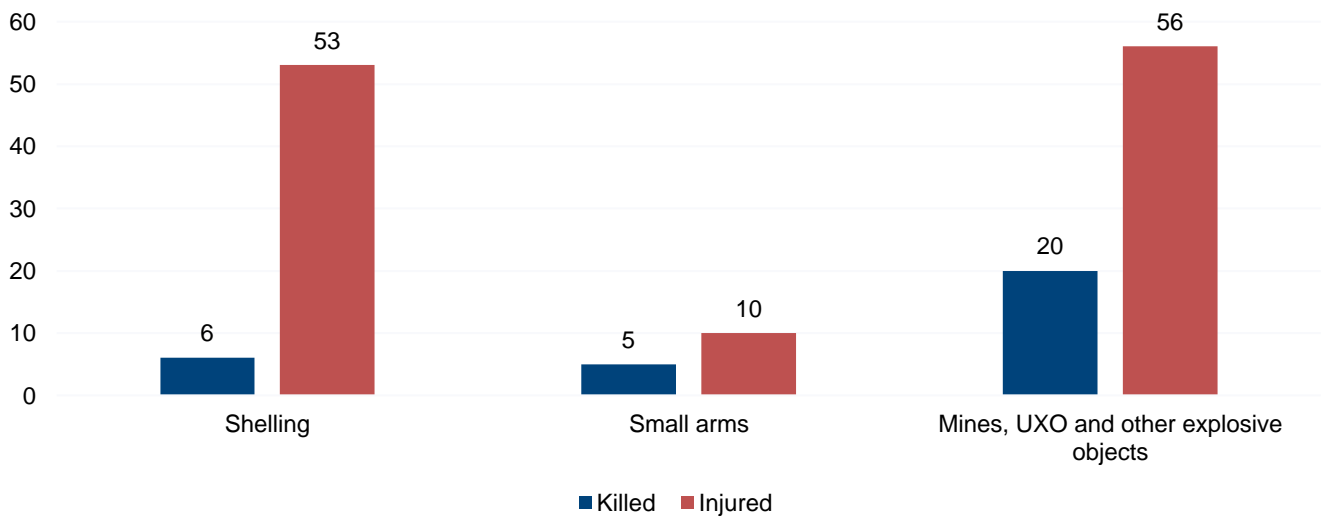
controlled Popasna and non-government-controlled Molodizhne, as well as along the road leading to government-controlled Katerynivka. These are routes routinely used by civilians and the SMM.

The presence of mines, UXO and other explosive objects also continued to prevent the SMM from patrolling in areas along the contact line, including on critical routes, and from accessing many areas and

settlements.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the factors that hinders the SMM’s ability to monitor and report on the impact of the conflict on civilians, in particular in settlements near the contact line. Following the fatal incident of 23 April 2017 near Pryshyb, probably caused by an anti-tank mine, which resulted in the death of an SMM patrol member and the injury of two others, the Mission has confined its patrolling to concrete or asphalt roads.

### CHAPTER 3: CIVILIAN CASUALTIES DUE TO MINES, UXO AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE OBJECTS

Figure 1: Civilian casualties due to shelling, small arms, and mines, UXO and other explosive objects November 2019 to March 2021



Since 2016, the Mission has confirmed nearly 1,500 civilian casualties of which over 470 were due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects, including one SMM patrol member who was killed and another two who were injured in April 2017.<sup>16,17</sup> During the reporting period the SMM confirmed 150 civilian casualties due shelling, small-arms fire and mines, UXO and other explosive objects (see

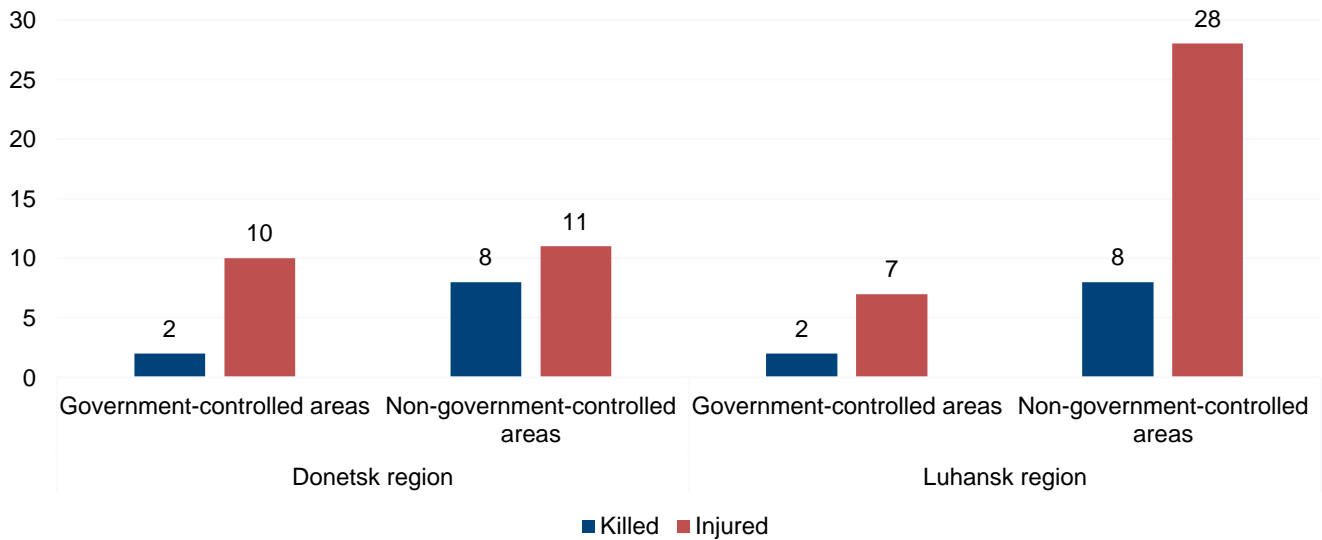
Figure 1). The majority of these, 76 casualties, were due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects, while shelling and small-arms fire resulted in 74 civilian casualties combined. Forty-five of the 76 casualties occurred in Luhansk region, where nine were registered in government-controlled areas and 36 in non-government-controlled areas. In Donetsk region, there were 31 civilian

<sup>15</sup> SMM thematic report, *Restrictions to the SMM's freedom of movement and other impediments to the fulfilment of its mandate, July – December 2020* (April 2020).  
<sup>16</sup> Civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects: 2016, 115 casualties; 2017, 150; 2018, 87; 2019, 48; 2020, 68; 2021 (until 31 March), seven.  
<sup>17</sup> Between January 2016 and 31 March 2021 the Mission has confirmed 1459 civilian casualties (432 occurred in government-controlled areas, 996 in non-government-controlled areas and 31 in areas not controlled by either side).

casualties due to these objects, of which 12 were registered in government-controlled

areas and 19 in non-government-controlled areas (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2: Civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects by region and control, November 2019 to March 2021

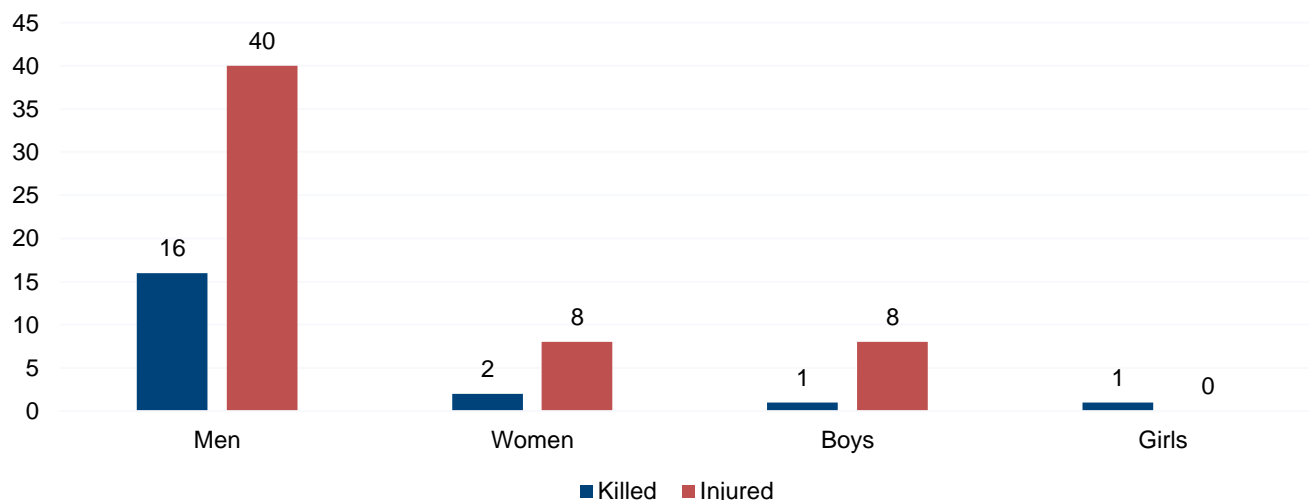


In 2020, since the enactment of Measures to strengthen the ceasefire on 27 July (agreed at the TCG meeting on 22 July 2020), the number of civilian casualties due to shelling and small-arms fire decreased. Between 27 July and 31 December 2020, the Mission received three reports of civilian casualties due to shelling or small-arms fire, which were all confirmed and reported in the SMM’s reports. However, despite fewer ceasefire violations, civilians continued to be killed by mines, UXO and other explosive objects with

37 civilians killed or injured by these objects. This led to mines, UXO and other explosive objects being the leading cause of civilian casualties in a calendar year for the first time since 2016 (when the Mission began to systematically corroborate and report civilian casualties). In the first three months of 2021, mines, UXO and other explosive objects continued to be the predominant cause of civilian casualties with seven out of the 11 civilian casualties confirmed by the Mission.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Mission received three reports of civilian casualties occurring between January and March 2021 which are pending confirmation. All three were due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects.

Figure 3: Sex and age distribution of civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects, November 2019 to March 2021

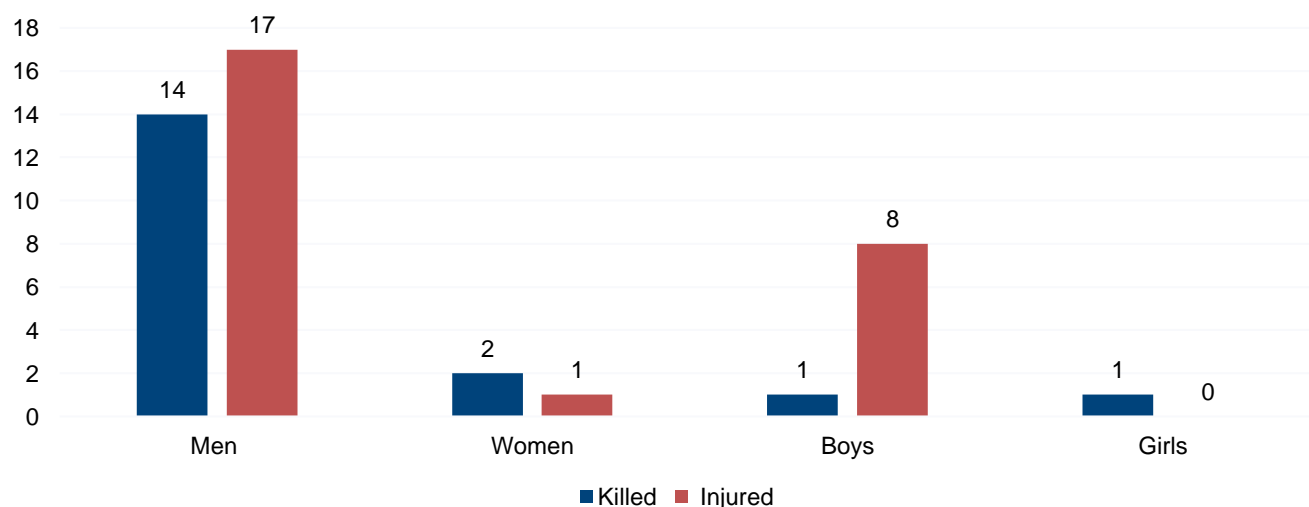


*Civilian casualties due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects by sex and age*

The majority of civilian casualties, caused by these objects, between November 2019 and March 2021 were men (74 per cent) followed by women (13 per cent), boys (12 per cent), and there was one girl (see *Figure 3* for civilians casualties disaggregated by sex and age). The distribution of casualties by sex and

age follows a similar trend as observed in the past and as reported in the Mission’s previous thematic report issued in December 2019, covering the period between January 2018 and October 2019: of the 133 civilian casualties (34 killed and 99 injured) due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects confirmed by the Mission, nearly 55 per cent were men, 22 per cent were women, 20 per cent were boys and three per cent were girls.

Figure 4: Civilian casualties due to mishandling or dismantling of ammunition, UXO and other explosive objects, November 2019 to March 2021



### *Civilian casualties due to mishandling of UXO, grenades and ammunition*

More than half of the casualties (44, 18 killed and 26 injured) were incidents where civilians mishandled or attempted to dismantle UXO or grenades. Of these casualties, 25 were in Donetsk region (seven in government-controlled areas and 18 in non-government-controlled areas) and 19 in Luhansk region (three in government-controlled areas and 16 in non-government-controlled areas). The majority of such cases involved men and boys. The cause of death or injury of all nine boys who were killed or injured was the mishandling of UXO or grenades (see *Figure 4*). In all three cases involving women, they were bystanders. In two instances, the women died.

As repeatedly highlighted by the SMM, civilians handle these objects to obtain scrap metal to sell, or to make souvenirs or out of curiosity. For instance, two men were injured in November 2020 in a scrap metal yard in government-controlled Volnovakha, Donetsk region. According to one of the men, they had picked up a bucket containing a metal object which then detonated. One of the men suffered injuries to his right hand and knee and the other to his eyes. In October 2020, two boys – aged 15 and 16 – were injured when they detonated a grenade in non-government-controlled Nyzhnia Krynka, Donetsk region. According to the mother of one them, the boys received the object from a third boy and thought it was a dummy grenade. Also in October 2020, a 39-year-old man along with his 60-year-old father and 35-year-old friend died due to the detonation of an explosive object while they were searching for scrap metal in the north-western outskirts of non-government-controlled Horlivka, Donetsk region. More recently, in February 2021, a two-year-old girl was killed when her

father accidentally detonated a grenade in their home in non-government Snizhne, Donetsk region.

### *Civilian casualties along riverbanks and lakes*

Civilians have also been killed and injured (13 casualties) while walking, swimming or fishing in or along rivers and lakes. Twelve of the casualties along riverbanks occurred along the Siverskyi Donets River (one in a government-controlled area and 11 in non-government-controlled areas), which forms part of the contact line in Luhansk region. For instance, in September 2020, a man in his forties told the Mission that he had gone fishing along the riverbank near non-government-controlled Sloviuoserbksk,

*“They went to the former industrial compound on the outskirts of Horlivka to collect scrap metal. They found some metal object and hit it, which caused the explosion, killing all three of them.”*

*A woman in her thirties talking to the SMM about her father and brother, who, along with a friend, died near non-government-controlled Horlivka on 30 October 2020.*

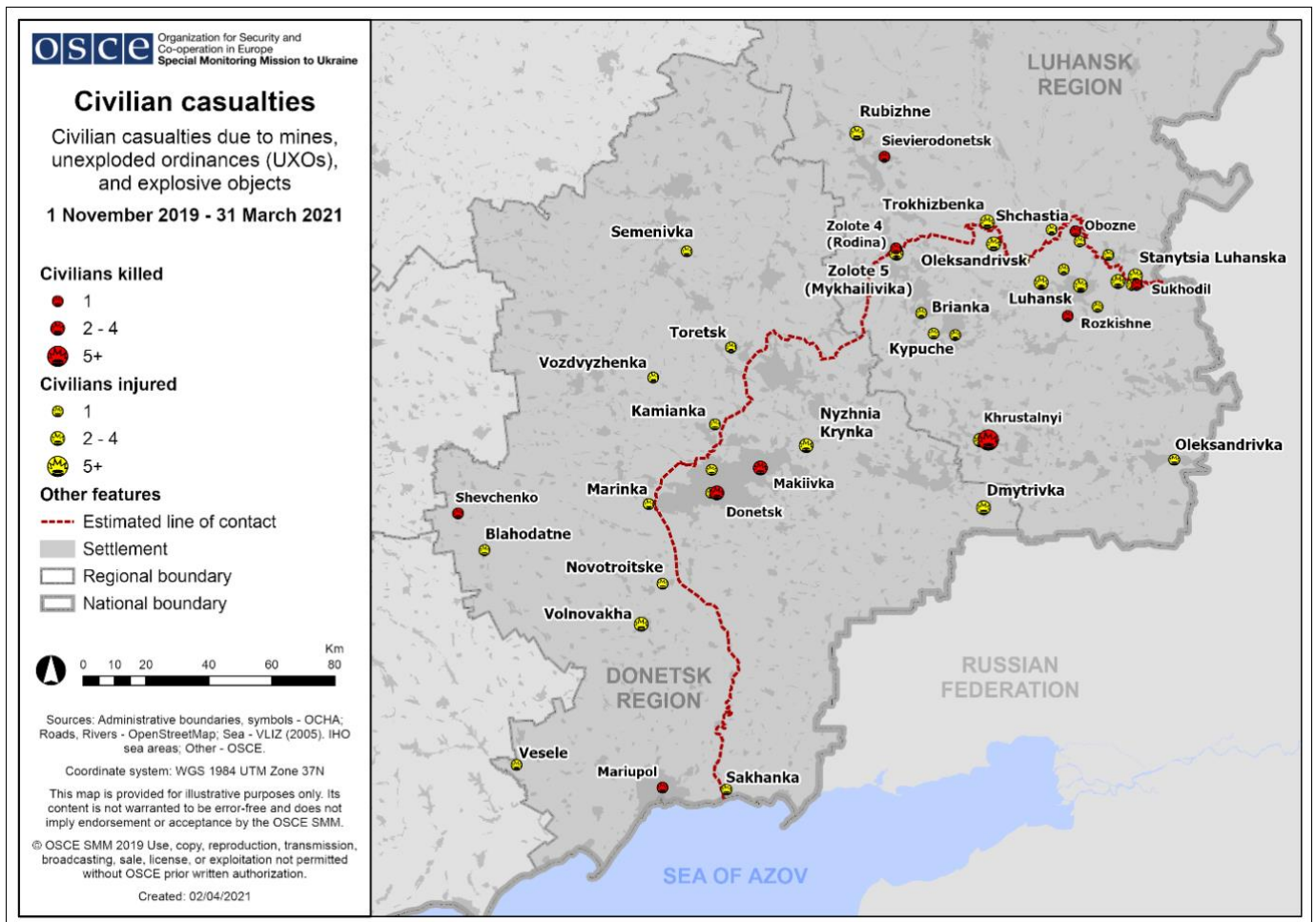
Luhansk region, and had stepped on an object which subsequently exploded, as a result of which he lost parts of one leg. In February 2020, a 57-year-old man died due to injuries and heavy bleeding caused by an explosive device. According to the man’s sister, he had sustained these injuries when he had gone to a riverbank to collect firewood. In Donetsk region, a civilian was injured while fishing on the shore of a lake in non-government-controlled Sakhanka. In addition, the Mission also corroborated cases where civilians were injured while working in fields,

battling wildfires and engaging in construction and maintenance.

*Access to assistance for victims and their families*

According to the 2021 UN Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), victims of mines, UXO and other explosive objects and their family members have limited access to specialized services such as physical and

psychosocial support, education and livelihoods assistance.<sup>19</sup> The HNO also notes that child casualties have limited access to quality rehabilitation services. The 2020 law №. 911 on *Mine action in Ukraine* also extends medical, psychological, professional and social assistance to all civilians who have suffered physical and psychological injuries as a result of explosives.



<sup>19</sup> See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, *Ukraine: 2021 Humanitarian needs overview, Ukraine*, (February 2021).



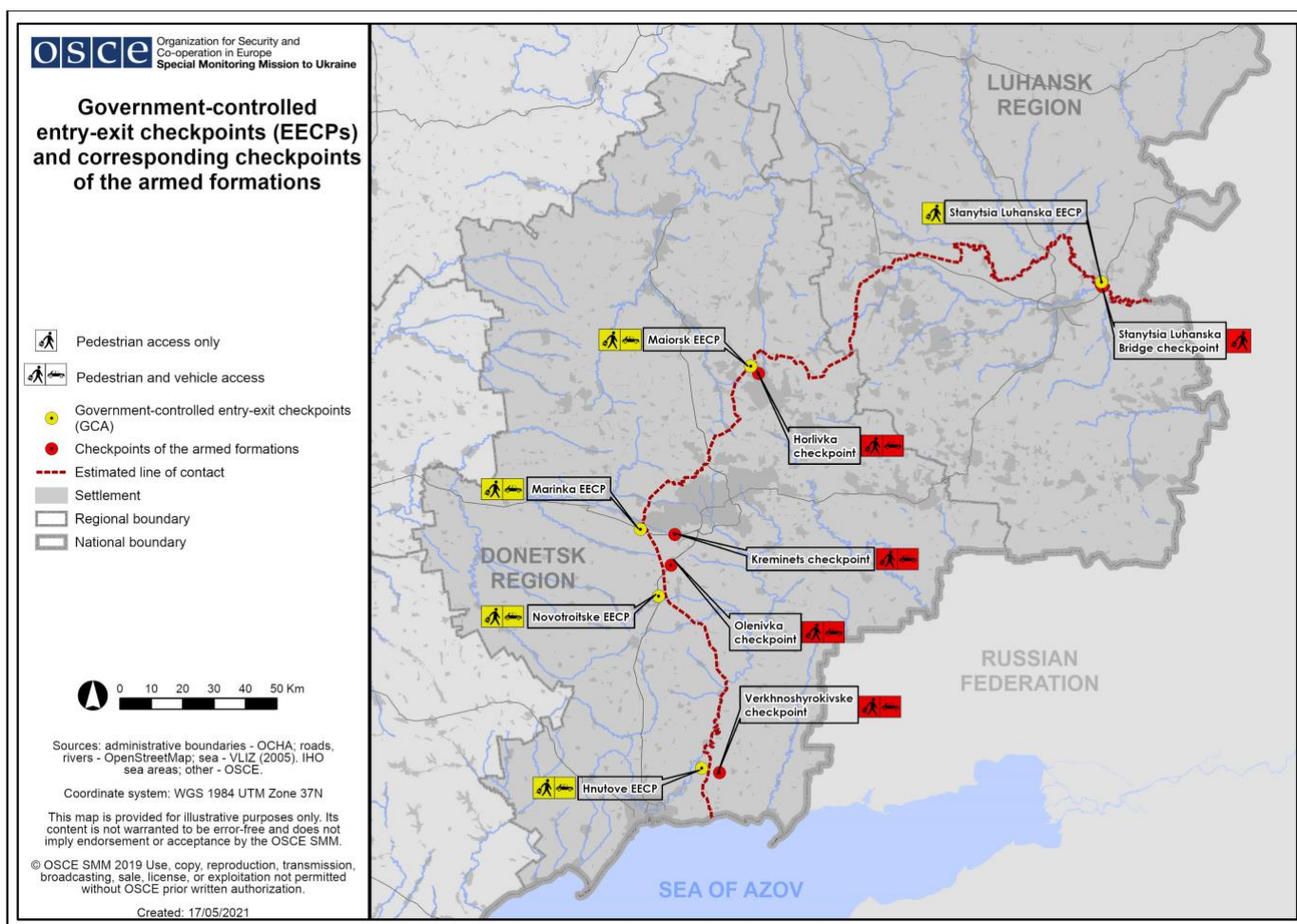
# CHAPTER 4: IMPACT ON CIVILIAN FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Beyond the threat of death and injury, the presence of mines, UXO and other explosive objects continued to have a detrimental effect on the ability of civilians to go about their daily lives. Whether crossing the contact line, working in fields, conducting subsistence activities such as gathering firewood, collecting mushrooms or fishing, or visiting the graves of relatives – all these activities are made more hazardous because of the presence of such objects. These risk patterns have not changed since the Mission’s December 2019 report. The section below outlines the challenges civilians continue to

face based on their accounts and through the Mission’s observations.

## Presence of mines at crossing points along the contact line and at other checkpoints

There are five crossing points through which civilians can cross the contact line. Each crossing point consists of a government-controlled EECP and a corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations (see *map below*).<sup>20</sup> In addition, there are two EECPs near government-controlled Zolote and Shchastia that are open for civilians; however,



<sup>20</sup> For more information on the structure and functioning of the crossing points see SMM thematic report [Checkpoints along the contact line: reasons why civilians cross and the challenges they face](#) (November 2019).

the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations are closed; as such civilians cannot cross at these two crossing points.

Civilians cross the contact line in both directions for a variety of reasons. For example, large numbers of the elderly, the majority of whom are women, travel from non-government- to government-controlled areas to collect their pensions. Civilians also cross for employment opportunities, to visit family and friends, to care for sick or elderly relatives, or to attend funerals. Further reasons include the need to access other social benefits, education and civil documentation in government-controlled areas, as well as services such as those related to healthcare, food and other products on both sides of the contact line.

Despite the explicit mentioning of crossing points in the commitments contained in Article 6 of the Memorandum and in the TCG's Decision on Mine Action of 3 March 2016 (see above), the SMM continues to observe the presence of mines and UXO in their vicinity. In its thematic reports on the impact of the conflict on civilians, the SMM has repeatedly highlighted the dangers that civilians face at the crossing points along the contact line due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects, as well due to shelling and small-arms fire.<sup>21</sup> Before new restrictions to cross the contact line were introduced in both government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a drastic reduction of crossings by over 90 per cent compared to 2019, civilians often expressed

their concerns about the security situation at and near the crossing points.

For instance, in the vicinity of the EECP near government-controlled Hnutove and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near non-government-controlled Verkhnohyrokiivske, Donetsk region, the SMM has observed about 1,900 anti-vehicle mines.<sup>22</sup> In March 2020, while traveling to Donetsk city and passing through a checkpoint of the armed formations near non-government controlled Olenivka, Donetsk region, the SMM observed the presence of two anti-vehicle mines on a green belt separating the lanes of the H-20 highway. On 13 March 2020, while crossing the last Ukrainian Armed Forces checkpoint between the EECP near government-controlled Marinka and the contact line, Donetsk region, the SMM saw four TM-62M anti-tank mines located about 10m from the paved surface of road H-15 used by civilians to cross the Marinka EECP. These mines were first reported by the Mission on 13 March 2019. The fields and adjacent roads surrounding the two new crossing points near Shchastia and Zolote are considered, by the SMM, to be contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects and unsafe for foot and vehicular traffic, with the exception of road T-1316 within the disengagement area near Zolote and road H-21 road near Shchastia, where demining work has been conducted by the sides (see *Chapter 7*).

As noted in the Mission's December 2020 report on civilian casualties, between January 2017 and 15 September 2020, 17 civilians (seven men and ten women) have been killed or injured due to mines, UXO and other

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<sup>21</sup> See thematic reports [here](#).

<sup>22</sup> In the vicinity of the EECP near Marinka and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations Kreminets the Mission observed over 430 anti-vehicle mines, around the Novotroitske EECP and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near Olenivka 140 anti-vehicle mines, around the EECP near Maiorsk and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near Horlivka nearly 750 anti-vehicle mines. In the vicinity of the EECP and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near Stanytsia Luhanska, while the Mission has not observed regular minefields, the area is contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects.



explosive devices at the crossing points near government-controlled Novotroitske and Maiorsk, Donetsk region, we well as at other checkpoints or while trying to use informal routes to cross the contact line. Between November 2019 and March 2021, the SMM confirmed one civilian casualty in areas near the five crossing points along the contact line. In May 2020, a 35-year-old woman lost her left foot and suffered numerous other injuries, including to her right leg and her face, near the EECP near government-controlled Novotroitske, Donetsk region. Additionally, on 13 August 2020, a 49-year-old man was injured when his excavator hit an explosive object in a field next to road H-21 between non-government-controlled Vesela Hora and government-controlled Shchastia, Luhansk region, near the area of the crossing point.

Over the years, the SMM has reported on civilians walking off paved roads near the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints in order to relieve themselves despite the risk of mines, UXO and other explosive objects in the area. In December 2019, the SMM observed civilians leaving the queue at the checkpoint of the armed formations near non-government-controlled Kremynets, Donetsk region, to relieve themselves. In August 2020, civilians queueing at the checkpoint of the armed formations near non-government-controlled Olenivka, Donetsk region, complained to the SMM about the state of the toilet facilities at the checkpoint, and the SMM saw a woman walk on soft ground near the road in order to relieve herself. These

instances highlight the importance of ensuring that civilians have access to clean and functional toilets, out of both health and safety considerations, on both ends of the crossing points.

The Mission has also frequently reported about civilians, including minors, being stuck overnight at the EECPs and the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations and in the areas not controlled by either side in between the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints. Quite frequently civilians stay overnight in these areas when they miss the closing time at either side of the crossing points due to the long queues.<sup>23</sup> This not only puts them at risk of being killed or injured by mines, UXO and other explosive objects but also due to shelling and small-arms fire that may occur overnight. Since March 2020, when restrictions to crossings due to the COVID-19 pandemic began, civilians had to stay overnight at the crossing points due to the limited information regarding the opening of the crossing points, the process of crossing the contact line and the constantly changing crossing requirements, particularly by the armed formations.<sup>24</sup> This lack of information meant that many civilians had to inadvertently spend the night in these hazardous areas, without proper security, adequate toilet facilities and shelter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For more information please see the SMM's thematic report [Checkpoints along the contact line: reasons why civilians cross and the challenges they face, January 2018 – October 2019](#) (November 2019).

<sup>24</sup> In Donetsk region, between 22 June and 7 July 2020, the lack of synchronization between the opening of the EECP near Novotroitske and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations near Olenivka meant that some people had to stay overnight in the area between the EECP and the checkpoint. From 26 to 27 June 2020, about 60 people were stranded in this area and had to sleep outside in hazardous conditions. On 7 July, more than 50 people were again stranded between the EECP near Novotroitske and the checkpoint of the armed formations near Olenivka until midnight, before being taken to hospitals in non-government-controlled areas. From 28 July onwards, the SMM noted that people were staying overnight between the EECP near Stanytsia Luhanska and the corresponding checkpoint of the armed formations. Between 28 July and 15 November, at least 130 people (including children, pregnant women, elderly people and people with disabilities) spent the night, some as many as ten nights, sleeping on the ground or on benches in the open in areas between the EECP and the corresponding checkpoint. These civilians told the SMM that they had been waiting for documents necessary to travel to non-government-controlled areas.

<sup>25</sup> For more information please see the SMM's thematic report [Checkpoints along the contact line: challenges civilians face while crossing, 1 November 2019 to 15 November 2020](#) (December 2020).



While the SMM has seen mine hazard signs denoting mine fields or areas contaminated by mines, UXO, and other explosive devices around the EECPs and corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations, more needs to be done to adequately mark off contaminated areas, particularly between the forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations. It is essential that the commitments to demine areas around the crossing points be fully implemented, so that civilians can cross in greater safety.

## Agricultural land

Agriculture represents a significant part of the daily life and economy of the civilian population in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In Donetsk region, there are 2.4 million hectares of agricultural land, out of which about 1.5 million hectares are in government-controlled areas. In Luhansk region there are 1.9 million hectares of agricultural land, out of



Government-controlled Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk region, January 2020

which about 1.4 million hectares are in government-controlled areas.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See: Donetsk Regional State Administration, [Investment profile of Donetsk region](#), 2018 and Luhansk Regional State Administration, [Investment profile of Luhansk region](#), 2018.



The level of contamination of these agricultural areas with mines, UXO and explosive objects can be clearly traced by civilian casualties confirmed by the Mission during the reporting period, as well as by the SMM's UAV observations. The SMM confirmed three civilian casualties (all injuries) in agricultural land or areas where civilians had taken their livestock for grazing. All three occurred in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region. In September 2020, a man in his forties sustained injuries including a minor concussion, bruises and facial wounds when an object he drove over with his tractor exploded while he was working in a field near non-government-controlled Metalist, Luhansk region. Also in September 2020, a woman and her son sustained injuries due to the explosion of a device in a field near non-government-controlled Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, Luhansk region. The woman told the SMM that she had been looking for her cow in a field near Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, together with her son and daughter, when she stepped on an explosive device. She said that both her legs

*“She is the only provider for her family and her disabled, bed-ridden mother. In 2014, her husband was also killed in a mine explosion.”*

*Civilians in non-government-controlled Zolote-5/Mykhailivka speaking about a woman who lost her leg due to an explosive object in a field on 28 September 2020 while she was rounding up her*

had been severely injured, resulting in the partial amputation of one of her legs. She added that her son had sustained injuries to his eyes, while her daughter had been unharmed. In Donetsk region, in September 2020, in an uncultivated field near government-controlled Chermalyk, an SMM mini-UAV spotted a damaged tractor, assessed as caused by the blast from the detonation of an UXO or an anti-tank mine. Near the tractor, the UAV spotted a fresh crater (about 2m in diameter). No casualties occurred during the incident (see image below).



During the reporting period, and in line with trends observed earlier by the Mission, the SMM learned that some communities on both sides of the contact line had stopped cultivating certain sections of farmland due to the threat posed by mines, UXO and other explosive objects. For instance, on 25 February 2020, in non-government-controlled Styla, Donetsk region, a woman in her thirties said that many people in the village struggle financially because they cannot cultivate their land since it is contaminated with UXO and mines. In July 2020, a man (in his sixties) and two women (in their fifties) in government-controlled Sopyne, Donetsk region, told the SMM that since 2015, the area has been contaminated with mines; all of them expressed serious concerns about the danger posed by these objects. The man told the patrol that he was a farmer and a cattle owner; however, a cowherd had recently found a mine in his fields and he had to move the cattle to a different location. In December 2020, in non-government-controlled Sadove (formerly Novopetrivske), Donetsk region, a man (in his forties) said that the fields near his house have been contaminated with mines

since 2014. There were no signs indicating the mined areas, but the local population was aware of their presence, and from time to time animals belonging to civilians in the area stray into the field and are injured or killed by the mines. Since the land is used neither for grazing nor farming, it is overgrown with weeds that put the area in greater danger of wildfires, such as the one that came near the settlement in the summer of 2020. The man told the SMM that firefighters arrived at the scene but could not properly intervene due to the mines.

In Luhansk region, in January 2020, the head of the Civil-Military Administration (CMA) in government-controlled Trokhizbenka informed the SMM that private gardens and pastures lie along the Siverskyi Donets River from east of government-controlled Orikhove-Donetske down to Lobacheve. He said that the area spans approximately 40km and is dangerous for civilians due to the presence of mines, and other explosive objects and should be considered a “grey zone”. In February 2020, in non-government-controlled Kalynove, two women (in their fifties) told the





SMM that mines and UXO in the area around Kalynove prevent farmers from cultivating their land. Also, in Kalynove, a man (in his

## **Contaminated wooded areas**

The danger posed to civilians by mines, UXO and other explosive objects in wooded areas is evident by the civilian casualties confirmed by the SMM. Four civilians were injured in wooded areas while fighting fires in government-controlled areas of Luhansk region. One man was injured in September 2020 while extinguishing a wildfire near government-controlled Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk region. The man told the SMM that on the afternoon of 1 September, he had been extinguishing a fire about 600 metres north-east of the new span of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge when he heard six explosive devices going off, one of which had injured his neck. In another instance, in October 2020, two men (in their thirties and forties), both employees of the Stanytsia Luhanska State Forestry Enterprise, were injured when their truck hit an explosive device near government-controlled Syze, Luhansk region, while they were attempting to extinguish a wildfire. A third man (in his forties), an employee of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, who was standing nearby when the explosion occurred, was also injured. The three men were hospitalized, one of them with injuries to his foot, one suffering from shock and one with a minor concussion.

Civilians have been informing the SMM for some time about the threat of mines, UXO and other explosive objects while trying to forage for mushrooms or collect firewood, upon which many households depend, especially during the winter season. For instance, in February 2020 in government-controlled Zoria, Donetsk region, the SMM

fifties) said that he had seen farmers remove UXO, so far without any incidents, but he feared it might not end well someday.

met two representatives of the district administration (a man in his fifties and a woman in her forties) responsible for the villages of Zoria, Vodiane, Pryovrazhne and Hranitne. Both interlocutors confirmed that area residents had been warned by the authorities to avoid tree lines, small forests or small pastures as they might still be contaminated by mines and UXO; however, despite these warnings, civilians sometimes enter these areas.

In Luhansk region, in January 2020, the SMM spoke with a 40-year-old female resident of government-controlled Voitove. The woman told the SMM that she works for a local private company that clears roads in the winter and provides, together with residents in the area, mine- and UXO-awareness activities for residents. She noted that, on several occasions, workers from the company discovered UXO and explosive objects in the fields or woods and reported them to the police and other authorities.

Furthermore, in March 2020, a local resident (a man in his sixties) in non-government-controlled Ozerianivka, Donetsk region, told the Mission that some of the treelines in the area were contaminated by mines; however, these areas were not marked by mine hazard signs. The interlocutor also said that on one occasion, a demining team had been there to inspect and prepare the areas for the construction of a pipeline and found mines and booby traps. He added that since then, civilians had been reluctant to collect firewood or graze animals in the area. On another occasion, in May 2020, in non-government-controlled Krynychna, Donetsk region, two

local women (in their forties and sixties), told the SMM that the forest behind the village was contaminated with mines and UXO and that residents avoided the location.

## **Riverbanks**

As noted above, and in previous relevant SMM reports, the contamination of rivers and riverbanks continues to pose a threat for civilians and prevents them from using the area for cultivation, grazing of animals, fishing or recreational purposes. The banks of the Siverskyi Donets River, in Luhansk region, are particularly contaminated. All 12 of the civilian casualties, the overwhelming majority of which were men, which occurred along riverbanks took place along the Siverskyi Donets River. In 2020, numerous civilians in settlements along this river told the SMM about their concerns regarding these areas. In January 2020, a man (in his late sixties) in non-government-controlled Krasnyi Yar, Luhansk region, complained that he had not been able to fish or to walk his dog by the river for a long time due to the threat of mines.

Civilians in government-controlled Trokhizbenka, Luhansk region, also told the Mission that the Ukrainian Armed Forces prevented them from walking near the river because of mines in the area. As noted in the previous section, the CMA in Trokhizbenka considers the area along the river as hazardous for civilians due the presence of mines. However, despite the threat, civilians continue to use the river for economic activities such as fishing, as well as for recreational purposes. The SMM recorded two civilian casualties during the reporting period due to mines and other explosive objects in non-government-controlled Pionerske, Luhansk region. One of the casualties was a 67-year-old man who was killed when he had gone to the river to collect

firewood near his summer house in the settlement.

The danger, however, is not confined to the Siverskyi Donets River. At the end of September 2020, in Donetsk region, the principal at a school in non-government-controlled Prymorske told the SMM that members of the armed formations had been putting up posters and distributing flyers to the local population warning civilians of the dangers of mines, UXO and other explosive objects in the forested areas near the settlement and along the banks of the Kalmius River. In 2018 and 2019, civilians in government-controlled Chermalyk and non-government-controlled Naberezhne, which are located across from each other along the Kalmius River, told the SMM that riverbanks were contaminated and that civilians were wary of venturing too close.

## **Cemeteries**

In the reporting period, the SMM did not receive reports of civilians being killed or injured due to mines, UXO or other explosive devices at cemeteries. Nonetheless, civilians in communities along both sides of the contact line have continued to share their concerns that their access to cemeteries was restricted due to the contamination of the area by these objects. In November 2019, civilians in the Kyivskyi and Kuibyshevskyi Districts of non-government-controlled Donetsk city told the SMM that the cemeteries in their districts were contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects. In January and February 2020, the village administration in government-controlled Novoluhanske, Donetsk region, told the SMM that one of the most pressing issues for the settlement was access to the local cemetery. The village administration told the Mission that before 2016 they had complete access to the

cemetery, but since 2018 this was reduced to biannual visits for civilians to tend to the graves. Similar concerns were raised by civilians in Luhansk region. In August 2020, two elderly women in government-controlled Zolote-3/Stakhanovets told the Mission they cannot visit the cemetery in their settlement and that it had been an issue for several years. In March 2021, civilians in government-controlled Chermalyk, Donetsk region, informed the SMM that the village had asked an international non-governmental organization to clear the local cemetery of mines, but lamented that the cemetery was always at risk of being re-contaminated due to the regular kinetic activity in the area.

The contamination of cemeteries by mines, UXO and other explosive devices in the settlements close to the contact line continues to impact the physical and emotional well-being of civilians, by exposing them to risks when visiting graves or by preventing them to adequately and safely mourn their relatives. Despite the dangers posed by these objects, civilians continue to visit cemeteries. For example, in February 2020, a woman from the Kuibyshevskiy District of non-government-controlled Donetsk city told the SMM that, while she was offered a plot at another

cemetery, she chose to bury her mother in the local cemetery, despite it being contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects, as all her relatives were buried there and she could not afford the alternative plot. She remembered that the ceremony was quickly conducted due to the kinetic activity in the area. The pallbearers had to watch their steps and the coffin kept bouncing. She said that she visits the cemetery on a regular basis as everyone does. In July 2020, the SMM saw civilians tending to the graves at a cemetery near non-government-controlled Vesele, Donetsk region. At the entrance to the cemetery there was a mine hazard sign.

*“We follow the path we know, and we carefully mind our steps. The conflict took everything from me, challenges are never-ending, and even after my mother died, she cannot rest in peace respectfully in that cemetery.”*

*Woman from the Kuibyshevskiy District of non-government-controlled Donetsk city speaking to the SMM about the mine-contaminated cemetery in the settlement, in February 2020.*

## CHAPTER 5: PRESENCE OF MINES, UXO AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE OBJECTS AROUND VITAL CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Numerous civilian infrastructure sites are located next to or in close proximity to the contact line, sometimes directly between positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and those of the armed formations. These vital facilities provide millions of civilians on both sides of the contact line with basic services such as water, gas, electricity and telecommunication services. The sites require frequent repair and maintenance by utility

companies, as the infrastructure at the sites is often decades old, and their location exposes them to damage from shelling and small-arms fire.

The proximity of these infrastructure objects to the contact line means that, in many cases, the areas around them are contaminated with mines, UXO and other explosive devices. If these objects are not cleared prior to the

conduct of repairs or maintenance, workers are put at grave risk. During the reporting period, the Mission confirmed one civilian casualty in areas where repair works were being conducted. In July 2020, a 38-year-old woman was injured while working on a gas line between non-government-controlled Khriashchuvate and Ternove, Luhansk region. She told the SMM that she had stepped on an object just off the road which had exploded and that her leg had to be subsequently amputated.

The need for preliminary demining work often increases the time needed for repairs or maintenance, adding to the hardship of civilians. For example, the water line between government-controlled Toretsk and non-government-controlled Horlivka, which provides potable water to more than 50,000 civilians, crosses the contact line near positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and those of the armed formations in Donetsk region. Sites close the contact line need to be inspected and cleared of mines, UXO and other explosive objects each time before workers can start repairs or maintenance. This is also the case with the Siverskyi Donets-Donbas (SDD) channel, which provides water to 3.25 million civilians in Donetsk region. When a pipe, which is part of the SDD water system, was damaged in July

2020 near government-controlled Shumy, the area had to be inspected daily before repairs could start. In another instance, in April 2020, the installation of new power line poles in the vicinity of the EECF near government-controlled Maiorsk, Donetsk region, was delayed for a few hours when workers found a UXO (an 82mm mortar round) that had to be destroyed on-site before the resumption of the work.

As noted in the previous thematic reports, at some sites, such as along the road leading to the Donetsk Filtration Station (DFS),<sup>27</sup> demining activities have to be conducted on a regular basis so that workers operating the infrastructure objects can reach them. For instance, as reported in the Mission's November 2020 report on civilian casualties in eastern Ukraine, on 9 March 2020, the SMM saw what it assessed as demolition charges on the eastern and western edges of road M-04 near the DFS. A number of 152mm artillery rounds and an anti-tank mine were placed in four vertical chambers about 1.5m below the surface of the road. The road is regularly used by civilian workers of the DFS and by the SMM. On 8 December 2020, the SMM saw that the chambers had been filled with sand and gravel, but could not confirm whether the explosives had been removed.

## CHAPTER 6: PRESENCE OF MINES, UXO AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE OBJECTS AROUND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

As noted in its July 2020 report on the impact of the conflict on educational facilities and children's access to education,<sup>28</sup> children have been killed or injured by objects that they

had found in schools and school playgrounds or brought into the classroom. While the SMM did not receive any reports of child casualties due to objects found in the vicinity of schools

<sup>27</sup> The DFS provides potable water for about 380,000 people on both sides of the contact line, including in government-controlled Avdiivka and Verkhnotoretske, parts of non-government-controlled Yasynuvata, Betmanove (former Krasny Partizan) and several districts of non-government-controlled Donetsk city.

<sup>28</sup> See SMM thematic report, [Impact of the conflict on educational facilities and children's access to education in eastern Ukraine](#) (July 2020).



or the detonation of objects in classrooms or on school grounds during the reporting period, the Mission continued to receive reports on the presence of mines and UXOs in the vicinity of educational facilities. In September 2020, the SMM saw mine signs when it visited a school in government-controlled Novoluhanske, Donetsk region. Also in September 2020, the SMM visited a school in non-government-controlled Mykolaivka, Luhansk region. The school is on the banks of the Siverskyi Donets River, which – as mentioned above – is heavily contaminated by mines, UXO and other explosive objects. It should be noted that since March 2020 schools have often operated in a distance learning mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic on both sides of the contact line, i.e. there were fewer instances of children frequenting educational facilities. The sides should use this time of limited activity at educational facilities either when they are not in session or in distance learning mode to clear the areas of mines, UXO and other explosive devices. The same applies for school holidays.

The Mission also continued to report on military and military-type presence (shooting ranges, occupation of civilian and administrative buildings, weapons storage, military compounds) within a 1km radius of educational facilities in both government-controlled- and non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The presence of positions near educational facilities not only makes the facilities indirect targets, but the weapons and ammunition that may litter the area also put the children, and civilians in general, at risk. In 2020, the Mission observed 19 such instances in government-controlled and non-government-

controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, compared with 36 instances in 2019.<sup>29</sup> However, it should be noted that due to the operational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission visited fewer schools than in 2019.

The threat posed by mines, UXO and other explosive objects to children highlights the need to provide children and civilians at large with education on the risks arising from these objects. During the reporting period, staff at educational facilities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, on both sides of the contact line, told the Mission of mine-risk awareness programmes being conducted for staff and students. In government-controlled areas, the programmes are administered by Ukrainian authorities with the support of a variety of international organizations and NGOs. For instance, in October 2020, at School No.2 in government-controlled Marinka, school staff informed the SMM that the school conducts regular mine-risk awareness activities, including reminding children of these dangers before the weekend, and that the International Committee of the Red Cross had provided posters, leaflets and other material for the school. During the same month, educational staff at School No.17, which is located about 3km from the contact line in government-controlled Novhorodske, Donetsk region, told the SMM about mine hazard signs in the vicinity of the school. The staff added that NGOs conduct mine-risk awareness training for students and staff, and twice a year the school trains older students to pass the information on to the younger ones.

In non-government-controlled areas, where the access and activities of international organizations and NGOs have been limited by

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<sup>29</sup> Schools with military or military-type positions within a 1km radius observed by the Mission in 2020: two instances in government-controlled areas (both in Donetsk region) and 17 in non-government-controlled areas (11 in Donetsk region and six in Luhansk region).

the armed formations, school staff in Staromykhailivka, Donetsk region, and in Holmivskiy, Pervomaisk, and Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, Luhansk region, told the SMM that the “emergency services” and “police” have been providing mine-risk awareness training at schools.

The predominance of the use of distance learning in schools in both government-controlled and non-government-controlled

areas during the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that children do not have the opportunity to attend these sessions and have these messages about the dangers of mines, UXO and other explosive objects reinforced. On the other hand, the restrictions on movement due to the pandemic means that fewer children are going to and from school, reducing the possibility of encountering mines, UXO or other explosive objects.

## **CHAPTER 7: INSPECTION AND DEMINING ACTIVITIES FACILITATED AND MONITORED BY THE SMM AND MINE-RISK AWARENESS CONDUCTED BY THE SMM**

As part of its mandate to facilitate dialogue on the ground, the SMM facilitates and monitors localized ceasefires for demining work to be conducted by the sides. In recent years, the Mission has facilitated and monitored demining work at cemeteries, in agricultural areas, at educational facilities and as part of repairs and maintenance work being conducted at critical civilian infrastructure sites. It should be noted that the SMM cannot confirm whether or not areas referred to in this section are free of mines, UXO and other explosive objects.

As mentioned in *Chapter 4*, mines, UXO and other explosive objects contaminate numerous cemeteries along the contact line in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Hence, demining activities near cemeteries are of relevance, in particular ahead of religious holidays, such as Easter, when civilians frequently visit the graves of their relatives. Between 30 March and 27 April 2020, the SMM facilitated and monitored adherence to localized ceasefires for inspection and demining activities to be conducted at 44 cemeteries in 27 settlements in government-

controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (see map below). Of the cemeteries demined in 2020, 23 (in 19 settlements) were in Donetsk region and 21 (in eight settlements) in Luhansk region.

During the reporting period, the Mission also facilitated and monitored adherence to localized ceasefires for inspection and demining of agricultural land in government-controlled areas of Luhansk region. This includes agricultural areas around Heivka, Orikhove, Stepove, Hirske, Novotoshkovske, Trokhizbenka, Lopaskyne, Stanytsia Luhanska, Kriakivka, Orikhove-Donetske and Myrna Dolyna.<sup>30</sup>

From November 2019 to March 2021, there were no instances where security guarantees were requested for demining work in and around educational facilities. However, in the beginning of 2019, the Mission facilitated and monitored adherence to localized ceasefires to enable demining around four schools and three kindergartens in government-controlled Hranitne and Mykolaivka, Donetsk region, and government-controlled Zolote-4/Rodina

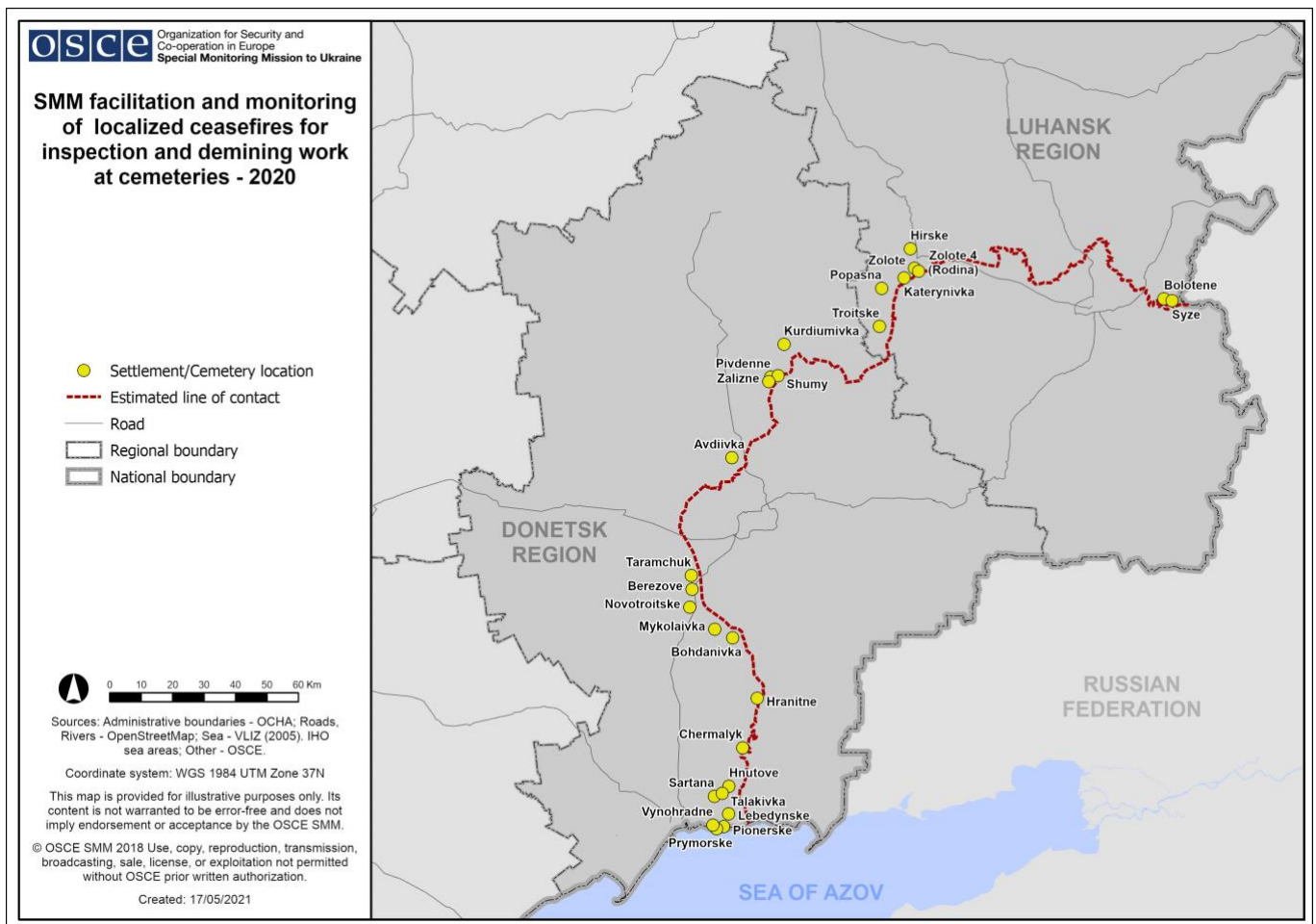
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<sup>30</sup> The SMM cannot confirm whether or not these areas are free of mines or UXO and explosive objects.

and Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk region, as well as three schools and two kindergartens in non-government-controlled Holmivskyi and Olenivka, Donetsk region.

In addition, as mentioned in *Chapter 5*, inspection and demining is routinely conducted by the sides as part of repair and maintenance work at critical civilian infrastructure sites. Between November 2019 and March 2021, the Mission facilitated and monitored repairs to over 150 infrastructure

sites which provide over six million civilians on both sides of the contact line with water, gas, electricity and telecommunication services. Furthermore, between July and November 2020, the SMM facilitated and monitored over 210 localized ceasefires to support the construction of infrastructure for the crossing points near Shchastia and Zolote, as well as for the preparatory works which included inspection and demining of the surrounding area.





*Demining of agricultural land near government-controlled Hirske by the State Emergency Services of Ukraine, Luhansk region, June 2020*

## **SMM mine-risk awareness activities**

Mine-risk education (MRE) plays a crucial role in mitigating the dangers of mines, UXO and other explosive objects for conflict-affected communities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine (PCU) supports Ukrainian authorities in developing education materials used by various actors in Ukraine and to train MRE trainers.

The SMM has also designed various MRE outreach materials, which are distributed by patrols in both government- and non-government-controlled areas. In government-controlled areas, the SMM has focused its efforts on distributing outreach material and conducting mine-risk awareness trainings in schools within 1km of the contact line, where there is a significant threat of mines, UXO and other explosive objects.

For example, on 20 February 2020, the SMM conducted a mine-risk awareness training at a school in government-controlled Mariupol,

Donetsk region. 60 children (27 boys and 33 girls) between ten and twelve years old took part in the interactive session. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of educational facilities and the introduction of distance learning as well as the adjusted SMM operational approach, no such presentations were delivered by SMM after March 2020.

However, starting in 2021, the SMM was again able to deliver mine-risk awareness materials to schools. In Luhansk region, the SMM provided mine-risk awareness materials in government-controlled Shchastia to School No.1 on 9 February. In government-controlled areas of Donetsk region it did so at schools in Hranitne on 5 March, and in Chermalyk and Myrne on 11 March.

Due to access restrictions to schools and other relevant structures, the SMM has not yet been able to provide mine-risk awareness in non-government-controlled areas. The SMM continues to deliver MRE training sessions



and guidance to its staff working in eastern Ukraine.

On the occasion of International Mine Awareness day on 4 April, in 2020 the SMM

## CONCLUSION

Mines, UXO and other explosive objects have a complex and pervasive impact on many aspects of the lives of civilians residing in conflict-affected areas of eastern Ukraine. It affects their physical security as evidenced by the 56 men, ten women, nine boys, and one girl who have been killed or injured, and the lives of their families who often have to take on additional responsibilities. The contamination of agricultural lands, riverbanks, wooded areas and crossing points by these objects curtails the freedom of movement of civilians and negatively impacts the social and economic aspects of their lives, as well as their psychological well-being.

Over half of all civilian casualties confirmed by the Mission during the reporting period were due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects. More than half of those 76 casualties were occasions where civilians were killed or injured while mishandling or attempting to dismantle grenades, UXO or ammunition. Civilians have also been killed and injured by these objects while working in fields, walking along riverbanks, collecting firewood and going about their daily activities. This evidences that even when ceasefire violations decrease, as happened after the enactment of the 22 July 2020 Measures to strengthen the ceasefire, civilians continued to be killed and injured due to the long-term impact of mines, UXO and other explosive objects. A

and the PCU issued a joint statement<sup>31</sup> and released a video in 2021,<sup>32</sup> together with the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine, highlighting the importance of mine action in eastern Ukraine.

decrease in ceasefire violations can risk creating a false sense of security.

In order to mitigate the risks posed by these objects, targeted mine-risk awareness and mine-risk education programmes need to be designed with a better understanding of where and how civilians encounter these objects, particularly men and boys who continue to most frequently suffer related death or injury. It is also essential that the medical and psychosocial needs of the survivors of incidents and their families, including socio-economic support, are met. Such needs, and the overall impact of these objects, will continue to affect the lives and livelihoods of civilians long after the conflict ends.

The presence of mines and other explosive objects also poses a threat to the safety of SMM staff and severely limits the Mission's freedom of movement, significantly impeding its ability to implement its mandate. Such restrictions continue to be encountered almost daily and are reported in the Mission's daily reports and periodic freedom of movement reports.

The signatories need to make urgent progress on the commitments they have undertaken in the 19 September 2014 Memorandum and the 3 March 2016 TCG Decision on Mine Action. These include the

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<sup>31</sup> OSCE SMM, [OSCE SMM Chief Monitor Cevik and OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine Villadsen reiterate need for mine action in eastern Ukraine](#) (4 April 2020).

<sup>32</sup> OSCE SMM, [Joint Statement on the occasion of international mine awareness day](#) (2 April 2021).

removal of mines from the 30km-wide security zone, prohibition on the laying of new mines, as well as an agreement to map, mark and fence off contaminated areas in the twelve priority areas. Action also needs to be taken to finalize and implement the draft framework decision on mine action, and an updated mine action plan, which includes 19 new areas agreed in principle in the TCG, in line with the Common agreed conclusions of the 2019 Normandy Four Summit in Paris. The sides should prioritize the security of civilians and conduct unilateral or co-ordinated inspection and demining work, as well as marking and fencing off of contaminated areas. In particular, regular inspection and demining is needed in the vicinity of the crossing points, including in the areas between the most forward positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and of the armed formations. The partial closures of the crossing points should be used as an opportunity to initiate regular inspection and demining activities in these areas, which should continue after the urgently required full opening of all crossing points. Similarly, the sides should use periods when children are learning via distance

education or during school holidays to inspect and clear contaminated areas around educational facilities.

In addition, it is essential that international organizations and the international community in general advocate against the use of mines in both government- and non-government-controlled areas and support the Ukrainian institutions responsible for mine action, including with capacity-building and equipment. The competent Ukrainian authorities should accelerate their efforts in fully implementing the relevant legislation and ensure the necessary budgetary means.

The longer the conflict lasts, the more casualties there will be, including those due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects. Only when ceasefire violations stop, can humanitarian demining be undertaken in a comprehensive way and additional casualties be avoided. Until that time, the marking and fencing off of contaminated areas, particularly those frequented by civilians, and mine-risk education, are of utmost importance and should be a priority.