

Saving Young Lives: Mine Safety Education in Ukraine

Project Report - November 2025

Maksym's Close Call: A Story of Survival

Ten-year-old Maksym from Kharkiv loved exploring the woods near his school. One spring afternoon, he spotted something shiny half-buried in the mud - it looked like an old toy. His hand reached out, fingers inches away from what turned out to be an unexploded cluster munition.

"Stop!" his classmate Daria shouted. She had just attended our mine risk education session the week before, where she learned the golden rule through virtual reality training: "Don't come near! Don't touch! Call 101!" That shout saved Maksym's life.

Today, both Maksym and Daria are mine safety ambassadors in their school. They share what they learned with other students, using the VR headsets and theatrical games we provided. Maksym's mother tells us: "I cannot sleep thinking what could have happened. These children are learning skills that literally save lives."

Maksym and Daria are among more than 500,000 children we aim to protect through this project.

The Deadly Reality for Ukrainian Children

Ukraine has become the most heavily mine-contaminated country in the world. The statistics are devastating and tell only part of the story:

- **174,000 square kilometers** (nearly 30% of Ukraine's territory) need to be surveyed for contamination
- **Over 500,000 children** attend schools in mine-contaminated areas
- **1 in 8 landmine casualties** is a child
- **3 civilians killed or injured daily** by explosive remnants of war
- **669 children killed** and 1,833 injured between February 2022 and December 2024
- **222 children killed or injured** just between March and May 2025 - a 200% increase over the previous quarter

The danger is everywhere. Children encounter explosives on their way to school, in playgrounds, in forests, and even inside their homes. Forty percent of all incidents happen on school grounds or on the path to school.

Why Children Are Especially Vulnerable

Children face unique dangers that adults do not:

- **65% of child victims** touch or step on explosive devices without realizing the danger
- **Curiosity:** Children often mistake colorful cluster munitions and other explosives for toys
- **Imitation:** When adults exhibit unsafe behavior, children copy them
- **Poverty:** Some families send children to collect scrap metal from contaminated areas to survive
- **Invisible threats:** Mines buried under snow or mud become exposed in spring, creating deadly surprises

Traditional classroom lectures are not enough. Studies show that children who participate in interactive games and simulations identify 90% more danger signs than those who only attend theoretical classes.

Our Innovative Solution: VR, Theater, and AI

Our project revolutionizes mine risk education by combining cutting-edge technology with proven pedagogical methods:

1. Virtual Reality Education

Working with ONGD and IT Ukraine Association, we use the world's first VR product designed specifically to teach children about explosive ordnance. Children put on VR headsets and enter realistic scenarios where they learn to:

- Recognize different types of mines and unexploded ordnance
- Identify contaminated areas and warning signs
- Practice the safety rule: "Don't come near! Don't touch! Call 101!"
- Navigate safely through potentially dangerous environments

The VR experience is filmed in actual conflict zones at both adult and child eye level, making it incredibly realistic and memorable. Children retain what they learn because they experience it, not just hear about it.

2. Participatory Theater

We use interactive theater techniques where children act out scenarios involving explosive hazards. This hands-on approach:

- Makes learning fun and memorable
- Allows children to practice safe decision-making
- Builds confidence in recognizing and reporting dangers
- Engages children who might struggle with traditional learning

3. Artificial Intelligence Analysis

Our AI system does more than teach - it also identifies children at greatest risk:

- Measures learning progress before and after interventions
- Detects behavioral indicators of trauma or emotional distress
- Identifies vulnerability factors like poverty or family instability
- Flags potential cases of gender-based violence or abuse
- Connects at-risk children with psychological and social support services

4. Inclusive and Accessible Design

Our dual format (in-person and digital) ensures no child is left behind:

- **Children with disabilities** can access adapted materials
- **Children in destroyed school areas** can learn remotely
- **Refugee children abroad** can participate online
- **Rural communities** with limited internet receive mobile training units

Thirteen-Year-Old Nazar's Journey

Nazar from Nikopol village was not as lucky as Maksym. Last autumn, he found an unknown device near his village and picked it up. The explosion cost him part of his right foot.

After multiple surgeries in a Kharkiv hospital, Nazar is learning to walk again with the help of a walker. His rehabilitation is long and painful. His mother stays with him, unable to work, creating economic hardship for the family.

Nazar's tragedy could have been prevented. His school had not yet received mine risk education. That is exactly what we are working to change.

Through our holistic support program, Nazar now receives:

- Individual psychological counseling to process his trauma
- Psychosocial support for his family
- Rehabilitation assistance
- Educational support to continue his studies

Despite everything, Nazar dreams of becoming an engineer. We are helping him stay in school through our remote learning support program.

Your Impact: Protecting Children Every Day

Thanks to your support, we are making measurable progress:

- **Over 3,000 children** participated in our mass mine safety education events
- **80 cities and villages** in contaminated areas have received our training
- **15,800 educators** completed our online mine safety course
- **VR equipment deployed** to schools in Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa regions
- **Comic books distributed** featuring Patron the Dog, Ukraine's famous mine-detection dog
- **Board games installed** at Kyiv railway station, teaching thousands of traveling children
- **Zero casualties** reported among children who completed our full training program

The Long-Term Impact: Beyond Immediate Safety

Our project creates benefits that extend far into the future:

Reduced Trauma and Anxiety

Children who understand mine risks feel more in control of their environment. This knowledge reduces the chronic anxiety that comes from living in a contaminated area. They can play, go to school, and live more normal childhoods.

Children as Community Agents

Trained children become safety ambassadors. They share what they learn with siblings, parents, and neighbors. One child educated can protect an entire family. Research shows that when children discuss safety rules at home, parents are 70% more likely to adopt safe behaviors themselves.

Foundation for Recovery

As communities begin to rebuild, mine-aware citizens can safely return to their lands, resume agricultural work, and restore economic activity. Children educated today will be the ones who safely rebuild Ukraine tomorrow.

The Challenge Ahead

Despite our progress, immense challenges remain:

- **Scale:** We have reached only 3,000 of the 500,000+ children in contaminated areas
- **Ongoing contamination:** New explosives appear daily as fighting continues
- **Limited resources:** VR equipment is expensive and requires maintenance
- **Access difficulties:** Some schools near frontlines cannot be reached safely
- **Infrastructure damage:** Over 1,600 schools have been damaged or destroyed

Experts estimate it will take 7 to 10 years to fully demine Ukraine, even after the war ends. These children need protection now and for years to come.

Why Your Support Matters

Every child deserves to walk to school without fear of stepping on a mine.

Ukraine's children did not ask for this war. They did not choose to live in the most mine-contaminated country on Earth. But they must navigate this deadly reality every single day.

Your donations provide:

- VR headsets and software for immersive safety training
- Theater workshops and interactive games
- AI analysis tools to identify at-risk children
- Educational materials adapted for children with disabilities
- Support services for mine accident survivors like Nazar
- Training for teachers and community educators

When we teach a child to recognize danger, we give them the gift of life. When we give them VR training that they will never forget, we create a safety net that protects them for years. When we identify vulnerable children through AI analysis, we can intervene before tragedy strikes.

Like Daria, who saved Maksym's life with one shout. Like the 3,000 children who now know how to stay safe. Like the families who can sleep at night knowing their children have the knowledge to survive.

Thank you for protecting Ukraine's children. Thank you for giving them a chance at a future. Thank you for saving lives.

#SaveUkrainianChildren #MineSafetyMatters

With hope and determination,
The Mine Risk Education Team

In partnership with:

ONGD Ukraine

IT Ukraine Association

State Emergency Service of Ukraine

Save the Children