

# Reducing the Threat of Landmines for Kosovo's Children

UNICEF started mine-awareness activities in Kosovo February 1998. At that time the threat was perceived to be the result of the indiscriminate planting of landmines. The high rate of injuries among children and youth indicated UNICEF's need to target children and their parents. Children and youth are especially at risk because of their natural inquisitiveness and risk-taking behaviors.

Initially, mine awareness started in the camps and targeted the refugees, who were in preparation for their return home. Mine-awareness messages were

developed using posters and leaflets. Immediately after the signing of the peace treaty, the Transitional/Repatriation phase was initiated by UNMACC, specifying safety behavior. Local media were involved in disseminating this material, along with UNICEF trained teachers and community workers in mine-awareness education. Surveys showed that this initial campaign was successful with refugees well aware of mines and behavior altering steps so as not to become a landmine victim.

While there are some common elements in mine-affected communities throughout the world,

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*A young boy, his leg injured from a landmine, sits among the ruins.*

Photo c/o ICRC



A child's drawing reveals a landmine problem.  
Photo c/o ICRC / David Higgs

effective campaigns are those that are adapted to local needs, culture and traditions. After conducting fieldwork and information about behaviors and victims, mine-awareness programs can be tailored for target groups. A monitoring and evaluation component is part of

all operations. UNICEF returns to schools and makes sure children have attended mine-awareness sessions, where needs-assessment surveys are conducted and external evaluations are all scheduled.

Enda Dowd, UNICEF mine awareness coordinator in Kosovo, feels that while it is early to identify successes, the Child to Child Program has proved popular with staff, education authorities and children. This unique project uses a child-to-child strategy. Children ages 10 through 14 are trained to disseminate information about the dangers of mines and UXO to their peer groups, younger children and their families. Games and other interactive approaches are used. Children are encouraged to create their own communication tools so that they can pass this information along easily to children and adults.

Another success that Dowd mentions is the easy start-up of UNMACC. "Unfortunately, one of the main challenges has been the number of agencies coming to Kosovo, and not going through UNMACC to identify where they are working. This makes coordination of efforts very difficult." The UNMACC produces a map indicating where organizations are working. Dowd also mentions the lack of accurate casualty data as being a concern. "Without a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the mine-education campaign, the drop in casualty figures cannot be attributed to it." Assessments will be carried out in the spring.

"Predictions are that casualties will drop over the winter period and then increase in spring when there will be more movement, and farmers and villagers will be anxious to get back in their fields. An assessment after spring will be particularly important," said Dowd.

The World Health Organization is in the process of establishing a comprehensive data collection system for mine/UXO victims in Kosovo, which involves the ICRC, and local clinics and hospitals. UNICEF states those children below the age of 14 account for 30 percent of landmine injuries and young adults between 15-24 are another 41 percent of injuries.

Mine-awareness campaigns have been especially challenging. The educational system within Kosovo has been devastated, with many schools vandalized or destroyed and an undetermined number of teachers injured or killed. In addition, landmines laid during the conflict, cluster bombs, UXO and the possibility of booby traps left by fleeing combatants, create an especially dangerous environment for children. A number of schools were used by the military and have been littered with mines, UXO and booby traps, which hinder the repair and reconstruction process. In many cases children are not aware of the danger. One boy, looking for books to read at a school, was injured. A mine/UXO-assessment has been conducted and organizations have been tasked with clearance projects, but this is a lengthy process.

A rapid assessment by UNICEF in an area west and south of Pristina, showed that out of 13 schools inspected, five were demolished, four were burnt, and one was suspected of being booby trapped. Only three were deemed safe and usable. The children's agency will provide educational kits or school-in-a-box, which contain both classroom and student supplies. The kits will also help to mobilize teachers, including those whom UNICEF is working with in refugee camps.

Currently, The Dodona National Puppet Theater is organizing a puppet show, which will incorporate mine/UXO awareness for children. They intend to start their puppet tour in areas of high mine awareness priority.

UNICEF has alerted people to the danger of landmines and will intensify mine awareness activities in Kosovo itself. The effort is focusing on providing mine/UXO-awareness educational materials in local languages to primary schools and communities. The development of resources to promote human and child rights and assist local reconciliation efforts through peace education will also be explored. The agency expressed hope that by restoring primary education, it will help Kosovo's children to have a tangible sense that normal life can and will go on.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams and Canada's Ambassador for Mine Action, Jill E. Sinclair, visited Kosovo on June 30 to July 1, 1999, to highlight UNICEF's mine-awareness activities there and to appeal for an intensification of demining in the war-torn province. "The risk presented by mines and unexploded ordnance in Kosovo is extremely high," Williams said. "Children are particularly in danger and many have already suffered severe injury or death because they have inadvertently stepped on these lethal and illegal weapons of war."

UNICEF's integrated mine-awareness education campaign, involves:

- Training teachers, social workers and volunteers in landmine-awareness skills.
- Dissemination of mine-awareness posters.
- Use of mobile theatre groups, radio broadcasts and other means of public education.
- Distribution, at border crossing points and in their home communities, of information leaflets to returning refugees.

"Landmines everywhere are a scourge of innocents and of children in particular," said Williams. "I hope the trip to Kosovo will make it clear that an

urgent priority must be placed on demining, and that concrete steps must be taken quickly to protect innocent children, women and others in the still-volatile province," said Sinclair.

UNICEF has been appointed as the U.N. focal point for mine-awareness education. They have developed International Guidelines to promote effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of mine-awareness programs. UNICEF and its partners have distributed more than one million posters and leaflets in Kosovo. Dowd said, "The overall goal for the program is to change people's behavior and reduce the casualty rate. Specifically we want to continue to incorporate mine-awareness education into school curriculum using a consultative process with local education authorities." ■



Using a UNICEF poster illustrating different mine warning signs, a UNICEF instructor leads a mine awareness class for a group of Kosovar refugee children in the Stenkovac I Camp.

Photo c/o UNICEF / Jeremy Horner

#### The latest casualty figures from UNMACC for 1999 are:

June—120	July—156
August—47	September—60
October—20	November—2