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## “THE LOST GENERATION”. THE GENEVA CONVENTION AND PROTECTION OF THE CHILDREN IN WAR

### „STRACONE POKOLENIE”. KONWENCJA GENEWSKA I OCHRONA DZIECI W CZASIE WOJNY

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejsze badanie analizuje krytyczne błędy mechanizmów ochrony dzieci przewidzianych w Konwencji Genewskiej we współczesnych konfliktach zbrojnych, wykorzystując wojnę rosyjsko-ukraińską do analizy pojawienia się zjawiska „straconego pokolenia”. Na przestrzeni dziejów dzieci pozostawały ofiarami przerażających zbrodni w konfliktach zbrojnych, jednak wartości społeczne ewoluowały, umieszczając prawa dziecka wśród najwyższych priorytetów społecznych. Prawa te zostały formalnie zapisane w Konwencji Genewskiej, uznającej dzieci za przyszłe pokolenie, którego rozwój ukształtuje nasze ramy społeczne.

W badaniu wykorzystano analizę interdyscyplinarną, łączącą porównawczą analizę prawną, ocenę statystyczną i metodologię empirycznych studiów przypadków, wykorzystując dane z UNICEF, międzynarodowych organizacji monitorujących i ukraińskich źródeł rządowych od lutego 2022 roku do chwili obecnej. Badanie dokumentuje 2520 ofiar śmiertelnych wśród ukraińskich dzieci od lutego 2022 roku, przy 57% wzroście w samym 2024 roku i średniej tygodniowej liczbie 16 dzieci zabitych lub rannych. Ponadto 5,1 miliona dzieci zostało przesiedlonych, 1600 szkół zniszczonych, a 786 placówek opieki zdrowotnej uszkodzonych, podczas gdy 40% dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym nie ma dostępu do wczesnej edukacji, a jedna trzecia nastolatków zgłasza poważne problemy psychiczne.

Zjawisko „straconego pokolenia” obejmuje nie tylko ofiary śmiertelne, ale także osoby, które przeżyły traumę psychiczną, kryzys tożsamości i długotrwałe szkody emocjonalne, które zagrażają przyszłej zdolności Ukrainy do odbudowy. Systematyczne ataki na placówki oznaczone symbolami ochronnymi Konwencji Genewskiej pokazują, jak względy polityczne systematycznie przeważają nad zobowiązaniami prawnymi, a naruszenia ze strony Rosji dowodzą, że siła polityczna ma większe znaczenie niż przepisy prawne. Chociaż artykuł 77 Protokołu Dodatkowego I Konwencji Genewskiej stanowi, że „dzieci powinny być przedmiotem szczególnego szacunku i chronione przed wszelkimi formami napaści na tle seksualnym”, mechanizmy egzekwowania prawa zawodzą, gdy główne mocarstwa odmawiają współpracy.

Badania ujawniają fundamentalne luki między przepisami prawnymi a ich praktycznym wdrażaniem, ponieważ międzynarodowe egzekwowanie prawa opiera się bardziej na polityce niż na wartościach prawnych. Zawite ramy instytucjonalne nie są w stanie poradzić sobie z sytuacją, w której główne mocarstwa systematycznie ignorują prawo międzynarodowe, co sprawia, że tradycyjne mechanizmy ochrony dzieci są strukturalnie niewystarczające dla współczesnych działań wojennych. Badanie dowodzi, że istniejące postanowienia Konwencji Genewskiej wymagają fundamentalnych reform i alternatywnych strategii egzekwowania, które będą działać niezależnie od naruszania współpracy stron. Bez natychmiastowych działań zjawisko „straconego pokolenia” będzie nawracać we współczesnych konfliktach, ponieważ każde dziecko reprezentuje niezastąpiony potencjał ludzki jako przyszły innowator i lider, którego Ukraina rozpaczliwie potrzebuje dla odbudowy i pokoju.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** konflikt zbrojny, prawa dziecka, naruszenia prawa międzynarodowego, symbole ochronne, naruszenia Czerwonego Krzyża, trauma międzypokoleniowa, niepowodzenia ram prawnych

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the critical failures of Geneva Convention child protection mechanisms in contemporary armed conflict, using the Russia-Ukraine war to analyse the emergence of a „lost generation” phenomenon. Throughout history, children have remained victims of horrific crimes in armed conflict, yet social values have evolved to place children’s rights among society’s highest priorities, with these rights formally enshrined in the Geneva Convention recognizing children as the future generation whose development will shape our social framework.

The research employs interdisciplinary analysis combining comparative legal examination, statistical evaluation, and empirical case study methodology, utilizing data from UNICEF, international monitoring organizations, and Ukrainian government sources from February 2022 to present. The study documents 2,520 Ukrainian child casualties since February 2022, with a 57% increase in 2024 alone and weekly averages of 16 children killed or injured. Additionally, 5.1 million children have been displaced, 1,600 schools destroyed, and 786 healthcare facilities damaged, while 40% of preschool-aged children miss early education and one-third of adolescents report severe psychological distress.

The „lost generation” phenomenon encompasses not only fatalities but survivors experiencing psychological trauma, identity crisis, and sustained emotional harm that threatens Ukraine’s future reconstruction capacity. The systematic targeting of facilities marked with Geneva Convention protective symbols demonstrates how political considerations systematically override legal obligations, with Russia’s violations proving that political power matters more than legal rules. While Geneva Convention Article 77 of Additional Protocol I states that „children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault,” enforcement mechanisms fail when major powers refuse cooperation.

The research reveals fundamental gaps between legal provisions and practical implementation, as international law enforcement depends more on politics than legal merit. The confusing institutional framework cannot handle major powers that systematically disregard international law, rendering traditional child protection mechanisms structurally inadequate for contemporary warfare. The study concludes that existing Geneva Convention provisions require fundamental reforms and alternative enforcement strategies that function independently of violating parties’ cooperation. Without immediate action, the „lost generation” phenomenon will become recurring in modern conflicts, as each child represents irreplaceable human potential as future innovators and leaders Ukraine desperately needs for reconstruction and peace.

**KEYWORDS:** Armed conflict, Children’s rights, international law violations, Protective symbols, Red Cross violations, Intergenerational trauma, Legal framework failures

## INTRODUCTION

### Problematic situation

Thought history war has been something unavoidable and children were/are victim of horrific crimes in armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> For a long time children have been viewed as second class citizens, that don’t necessarily need fundamental rights.<sup>2</sup> Social values have evolved significantly, placing children’s rights and safety among society’s highest priorities, demanding comprehensive protection and care.<sup>3</sup> These rights are formally established in the Geneva Convention, recognizing children as the future generation whose development will ultimately shape our entire social framework.<sup>4</sup> When society fails to protect children today, foundation of tomorrow’s society is

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson J., International Humanitarian and Human-Rights Law Pertaining to Child Civilians in Armed Conflict: An Overview, *Journal for Contemporary Roman-Dutch Law*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 2002, 186-187.

<sup>2</sup> Wall J., Human Rights in Light of Childhood, *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, Vol. 16, 2008, 523-524.

<sup>3</sup> Mirbozorgi K. S., Sarhadi R., Fotuhi E., International Challenges to Children’s Rights, *International Journal of Advanced Research in Humanities and Law (IJREL)*, 2024, 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> Mirbozorgi K. S., Sarhadi R., Fotuhi E., International Challenges to Children’s Rights, *International Journal of Advanced Research in Humanities and Law (IJREL)*, 2024, 26-27.

being compromised. The investment made in their safety and well-being directly determines the kind of world they will create as adults.

Children as victims of war are protected by various international and also regional acts of law.<sup>5</sup> The Geneva Convention aligns with this societal shift, as it also safeguards children's rights and explicitly outlines in its protocols how children must be protected and cared for during armed conflicts.<sup>6</sup> The Convention's child protection norms create binding obligations for all signatory nations, ensuring that the moral imperative to protect children becomes a legal requirement with global enforcement mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> Children must be protected at all costs because they represent the future generation capable of creating fundamentally transformative changes in society. Since children lack the capacity and means to defend themselves, international laws and conventions prioritize their protection as a primary obligation. This protection is not merely humanitarian—it's an investment in humanity's future, as today's protected children become tomorrow's innovators, leaders, and changemakers. When safeguarding children, potential for progress is being preserved, peace, and positive transformation that only the next generation can deliver.

It can only be imagined what is happening in reality from the comfort of safe houses, protected from the sounds of sirens and the fear that are engraved in Ukrainian children every night. While hearing about terrible destruction there and go about our normal lives—attending school, playing with friends, sleeping peacefully—action must be taken now to protect children from this suffering. The contrast between our secure daily routines and their traumatic reality should compel us to immediate action, not comfortable indifference.

How does Geneva Convention seek to protect children during war and what does it symbolize? where does legal protection fall dramatically short in practice, and outline what concrete actions must be taken to prevent another lost generation. Sometimes good intentions and legal frameworks mean nothing without enforcement, and that saving Ukraine's children requires more than sympathy—it demands systemic change in how society responds to war crimes against the most vulnerable.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **Main research objective**

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Geneva Convention child protection mechanisms during armed conflict, assess the scope and characteristics of violations against Ukrainian children since February 2022, and identify systematic weaknesses in

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<sup>5</sup> Robinson J., The Right of Child Victims of Armed Conflict to Reintegration and Recovery, *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2012, 47-48.

<sup>6</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.

international humanitarian law enforcement while proposing concrete strategies to prevent the emergence of a „lost generation” in current and future conflicts.

### **Specific research objectives**

1. Conducting a comprehensive legal analysis of the child protection mechanisms established under the Geneva Convention and their application in contemporary armed conflicts, with particular focus on the Russia-Ukraine war.
2. Determining the scale of humanitarian losses caused by violations against Ukrainian children, including casualties, displacement, educational disruption, and long-term psychological trauma that constitutes the „lost generation” phenomenon.
3. Analysing the enforcement failures of international humanitarian law when confronted with systematic violations by major powers, and developing actionable strategies for preventing the creation of future „lost generations” through enhanced legal, diplomatic, and humanitarian interventions.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEMS**

### **Main research problem**

The article’s main problem involves the critical analysis of Geneva Convention enforcement failures, the assessment of generational losses constituting Ukraine’s „lost generation,” the development of innovative accountability instruments beyond traditional diplomatic channels, and the identification of prospects for strengthening international humanitarian law through enhanced monitoring systems, economic sanctions targeting violators, and community-based protection networks that can operate independently of state cooperation.

### **Detailed research problems**

The Geneva Convention’s child protection mechanisms demonstrate critical enforcement failures when confronted with systematic violations by major powers, as political considerations systematically override legal obligations in international humanitarian law. Military developments and warfare tactics evolve faster than legal frameworks can adapt, creating protection gaps that render traditional enforcement mechanisms ineffective. The „complex and confusing patchwork of institutions” proves inadequate when major powers like Russia refuse cooperation, while Geneva Convention symbols are deliberately targeted rather than respected. International law enforcement depends more on political merit than legal merit, undermining the fundamental premise of universal humanitarian protection. This creates a scenario where legal protections exist on paper but fail catastrophically in practice when most needed.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### **Main hypothesis.**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is critically exposing the fundamental inadequacies of the Geneva Convention’s child protection mechanisms, revealing the urgent need for innovative enforcement strategies and alternative intervention frameworks that can function independently of

traditional state cooperation to prevent the emergence of „lost generations” in contemporary armed conflicts.

### **Specific hypotheses.**

The systematic violations of Geneva Convention child protection provisions by Russia demonstrate that political considerations systematically override legal obligations in international humanitarian law, rendering traditional enforcement mechanisms ineffective when major powers refuse compliance.

The escalating trauma and displacement affecting Ukrainian children (with 57% increase in casualties and 5.1 million+ displaced) constitutes a „lost generation” phenomenon that will have irreversible long-term consequences for individual development, national reconstruction capacity, and intergenerational trauma transmission.

The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure marked with protective symbols undermines the fundamental premise of Geneva Convention protections, requiring alternative humanitarian strategies that can operate without reliance on symbolic recognition or state cooperation.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodological foundation of this study is based on a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to examining the failures of international humanitarian law in protecting children during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Given the complexity of the issue, the research employs a combination of legal analysis, statistical evaluation, comparative case studies, and humanitarian impact assessment methods, which allow for the identification of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of child protection failures.

The use of comparative legal analysis made it possible to trace the evolution of Geneva Convention child protection provisions from 1949 to present day, examining their application across different conflicts to identify patterns of compliance and violation. This analysis reveals the systematic gaps between legal frameworks and practical enforcement when major powers are involved as violating parties.

The assessment of humanitarian impact trends was carried out using statistical analysis of child casualty data, displacement figures, and psychological trauma indicators from UNICEF, WHO, and other international monitoring organizations. To identify the correlation between conflict escalation and child vulnerability indicators, Pearson correlation coefficients were applied to quantify the relationship between military actions and civilian casualties, particularly focusing on child-specific impacts.

Content analysis methodology was employed to examine official Geneva Convention texts, Additional Protocols, and their practical interpretation in contemporary conflicts. This involved systematic analysis of legal provisions (particularly Article 77 of Additional Protocol I) against documented violations, creating a framework for understanding the gap between legal intent and practical application.

By applying the method of structural-logical analysis, the research constructed a comprehensive model of „lost generation” development, integrating psychological trauma research, educational disruption data, and long-term societal impact studies. This methodology enabled the integration of individual trauma indicators with broader societal consequences, adapting international post-conflict recovery frameworks to the Ukrainian context.

Empirical case study analysis was utilized to document specific instances of Geneva Convention violations, including the targeting of hospitals marked with Red Cross symbols, forced displacement of children, and systematic destruction of educational infrastructure. Statistical data were obtained from international monitoring organizations, Ukrainian government sources, and independent humanitarian agencies to ensure comprehensive coverage of the humanitarian crisis scope.

### **The Legal Protections Under the Geneva Convention**

The Geneva Conventions represent the cornerstone of modern international humanitarian law, which sets fundamental limits and clear lines on how war may/should be conducted.<sup>8</sup> At one point it is viewed as old-fashioned, but in reality, it has all the basic needs that makes it timeless in a sense.<sup>9</sup> Throughout history, warfare has been an inevitable part of human existence, making it essential to establish restrictions that protect our core values of human decency and dignity.<sup>10</sup> Humanly act of decency is to protect civilians that are caught in the fire of nations and have no means to protect themselves.<sup>11</sup> While the Geneva Convention establishes clear rules and limitations designed to protect civilians during armed conflict, fundamental questions remain about their adequacy. Can humanitarian principles be maintained when facing an opponent like Russia that systematically disregards international law?

Geneva Convention in some aspects considered as one of the key points of protecting victims, but in its own way this statement seems academic and too good to be true.<sup>12</sup> Society mustn't be blinded and think that setting rules would be enough to make the parties considerate while being in warfare. Civilians are under legal protection by the Geneva convention, in other words, the so called “Law of War” protects them.<sup>13</sup> But how can they actually be protected? Countless legal frameworks and principles exist that outline exactly what should be done and how to do it. Yet society cannot continue to hope endlessly that Russia will follow these rules to the letter. This expectation is far too unrealistic and simply doesn't match the reality that society is facing today. Today's challenge requires us to think smarter and act more efficiently.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard R. B., *The Geneva Conventions of 1949*, International Law Studies Series. US Naval War College, Vol. 62, 220-221.

<sup>9</sup> Richard R. B., *The Geneva Conventions of 1949*, International Law Studies Series. US Naval War College, Vol. 62, 221-222.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques M., *Humanitarian Law, the ICRC, and Promoting the Geneva Conventions*, American University Law Review, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1982, 820-822.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques M., *Humanitarian Law, the ICRC, and Promoting the Geneva Conventions*, American University Law Review, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1982, 820-822.

<sup>12</sup> Theodor M., *The Geneva Conventions as Customary Law*, American Journal of International Law, Vol. 81, No. 2, 1987, 348-350.

<sup>13</sup> Delahunty R. J., *Is the Geneva Pow Convention Quaint Part I: Ten Questions*, William Mitchell Law Review, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2007, 1635-1636.

## The „Lost Generation” Phenomenon

As mentioned earlier, the Geneva Conventions safeguard all victims and civilians in armed conflict, including both adults and children, with several key articles specifically addressing children’s rights during armed conflicts.<sup>14</sup> “War is not child’s play”<sup>15</sup>, it is not a place meant for a child to be involved in. Their involvement in armed conflict in any kind of way is immoral and intolerable.<sup>16</sup> Children should not be treated as mere extensions of the adult world, but recognized as individuals with their own distinct social needs and social structures.<sup>17</sup> Among war’s most vulnerable victims are children, whose lives, futures, and families become casualties of violence. Ukraine’s ongoing conflict exemplifies this tragedy, with a new generation being lost daily. Children are exposed to violence and their homes have become battlefields where they need to fight for survival. The 21st century is witnessing the loss of generations that cannot be easily restored.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions, reinforced by the 1977 Additional Protocols, explicitly recognize this vulnerability. Article 77 of Additional Protocol I states: “Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require.” These words do more than declare intent—they establish a legal obligation: it is not only unlawful to harm a child during war, but all parties in a conflict must actively protect and care for them. This includes shielding children from violence, exploitation, recruitment, and separation from their families.

By „lost generation”, it is referred not merely to those who have perished, but equally to the survivors who are enduring psychological trauma, identity crisis, and sustained emotional harm. The stress of multiple traumatic experience in war may impact severely on the child’s development, which might exceed the individual’s coping skills, resulting in physiological, psychological, and psychosocial symptoms.<sup>18</sup> Research shows that traumatic effects occur in all age groups, from infants to older children, though the effects on babies are often unpredictable and manifest in different ways.<sup>19</sup> The implications of this widespread trauma extend far beyond individual suffering—they threaten the very foundation of Ukraine’s future society. When an entire generation carries the invisible wounds of war, the consequences ripple through decades. These children, whether they realize it or not, were supposed to shape Ukraine’s tomorrow as leaders, parents, teachers, and important citizens. Their trauma becomes Ukraine’s trauma that won’t

<sup>14</sup> <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-77/commentary/1987?activeTab=> «Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977 » (Access: 25.09.2025)

<sup>15</sup> Udombana N. J., War is Not Child’s Play! International Law and the Prohibition of Children’s Involvement in Armed Conflicts, Temple International & Comparative Law Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2006, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Udombana N. J., War is Not Child’s Play! International Law and the Prohibition of Children’s Involvement in Armed Conflicts, Temple International & Comparative Law Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2006, 57-58.

<sup>17</sup> James A., James A. L., Childhood: Toward a Theory of Continuity and Change, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 575, 2001, 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> nature.com <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-023-02438-8> «The effects of war, displacement, and trauma on child development» 2023, (Access: 25.09.2025).

<sup>19</sup> Feldman R., Vengrober A., Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Infants and Young Children Exposed to War-Related Trauma, Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Volume 50, No. 7, 2011, 645-646.

be healed easily. This might cause future generational trauma. This seems quite logical because as said these children of war will also become parents that might hand their trauma to their future generation (Intergenerational effect). Overall, their healing becomes Ukraine's healing, because they are the most important substance of Ukraine's brighter future.

This is why the „lost generation” represents more than a humanitarian crisis—it is a national emergency that demands immediate, sustained intervention. Every day of delayed action means more children sink further into trauma. Their potential lost because of experiences no child should endure. The unpredictable nature of infant trauma particularly concerns us, as these youngest victims may carry invisible scars that only emerge years later, when intervention becomes far more complex and costly.

Ukraine cannot afford to lose this generation. Not because of statistics or political statements, but because each of this child is an irreplaceable human potential—future innovators, peace-builders, and leaders that Ukraine desperately needs. The question is not whether society can afford to help them recover, but whether there is a luxury not to. Their survival and healing are not just something that is obliged by human morality, this is a true investment in Ukraine's very existence as a functioning, thriving nation today and also tomorrow. The time for action is now, before „lost” will become irreversible in a bigger sense.

### **Geneva Conventions enforcement and interpretation**

Why Geneva convention, when there are other international and local rules, regulations<sup>20</sup>? While the Geneva Convention has evolved over time, it cannot remain fully current because military developments and warfare tactics advance faster than the legal framework can adapt.<sup>21</sup> The known legal obligations is clear and understand what should be done. But what is the hint behind it? Is humanity only trying to hold on something that is already old-fashioned and out of date?

It's meaningless to discuss what's written in law or how things should be done when there are no consequences and no means of enforcement. International law enforcement depends more on politics than on what's actually legal.<sup>22</sup> The Russia-Ukraine war clearly shows this problem. The confusing mix of different institutions can't handle a major power like Russia that simply won't cooperate. Russia's constant violations of children's rights under the Geneva Conventions prove that political power matters more than legal rules. Until nothing will change children in conflicts involving major powers will remain vulnerable—not because legal protections don't exist, but because politics determines whether they can enforce or not law on the perpetrator. Given these enforcement failures, effective child protection increasingly requires complementing legal approaches with alternative strategies. First, preventive diplomacy and mediation must be

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<sup>20</sup> Brasebin J., *Children and armed conflict: A guide to International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law*, 2010, 41-42.

<sup>21</sup> Weihua Z., *Modernization of International Humanitarian Law - The Origins and Evolution of the 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions*, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 17, No. 6, 2018, 653-654.

<sup>22</sup> Bruggeman W., *International Law Enforcement Co-operation: A Critical Assessment*, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, Vol. 9, 2001, 289- 290.

employed before conflicts escalate to reduce the likelihood of systematic violations.<sup>23</sup> Second, community-based protection strategies should be developed that can operate independently of state cooperation, empowering local networks<sup>24</sup> to safeguard children when international mechanisms fail. Third, economic incentives for compliance need implementation<sup>25</sup>, including targeted sanctions and financial consequences that make violations costly for perpetrating states.

In most aspects Geneva conventions symbols: the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Red Crystal represent peace and protection in humanitarian law.<sup>26</sup> The Red Cross carries broad significance as a symbol of unity during armed conflict, representing the fundamental principle that humanity's dedication to protection and care transcends all boundaries in times of war.<sup>27</sup> As it is seen Geneva conventions symbols represent a universal covenant - that regardless of one's religion, nationality, ethnicity, or political belief, every person deserves protection and dignity, especially in times of war. Yet, in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, these very symbols—and the humanitarian ideals they represent—have come under immense strain. The conflict has exposed the fragile line between law and violence, between promise and practice. Despite international appeals and legal frameworks meant to protect the innocent, the realities on the ground in Ukraine often reflect a brutal disregard for those protections. This war serves as a stark reminder: the Geneva Conventions and their symbols are only as strong as the international community's willingness to uphold them.

In the end, the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Crystal are more than emblems—they are tests of our collective humanity. But the true test of the Geneva Conventions is whether the international community is willing to uphold them in practice, not just in principle. Society can speak about what there is written, but the important question are they using these principles to protect the welfare of the future generation. Are they making a change in the life of a child that needs help the most when their home is no more? Otherwise, these symbols lose their meaning in Ukraine, their power to protect in any future conflict is weakened for us all.

### **The realities of war**

What is our current reality? How many lives must be sacrificed before society recognizes the ongoing violence that threatens us all without exception? As of the latest data available on July 31, 2025, (Figure 1) the chart shows that 13,883 people have been killed and 35,548 injured in the conflict. Among them, 726 children were killed and 2,234 were injured. Children accounted for approximately 5.2% of total deaths and 6.3% of total injuries, reflecting a rise in the proportion of child casualties. This increase of just over one percentage point highlights a deeply concerning

<sup>23</sup> Antoniuk O., *Mediation and Diplomacy*, Law Review of Kyiv University of Law, Vol. 2014, No. 2, 2014, 355-356.

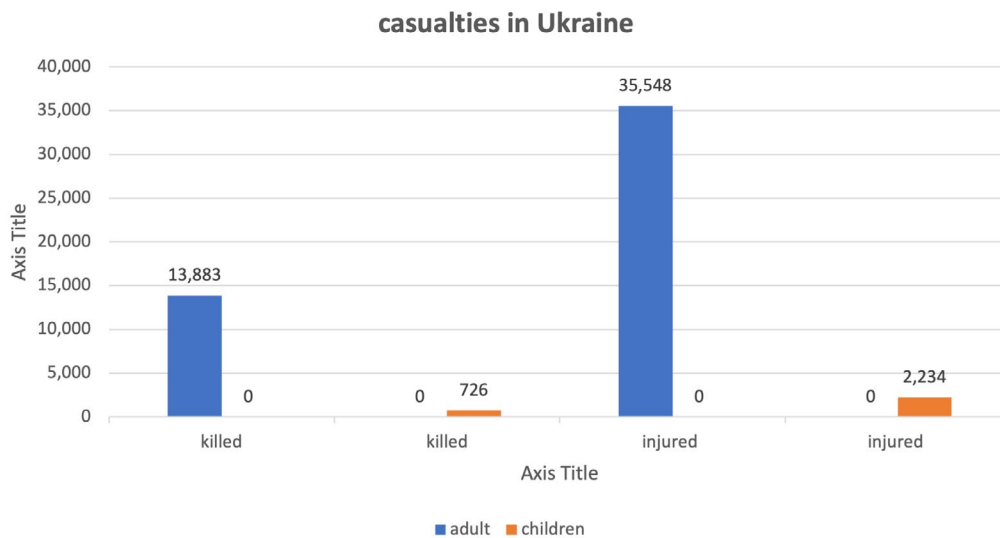
<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey W. L., Wesley Y. C., Lovaglia, M. J.; Markovsky B., *Lines of Power in Exchange Networks*, Social Forces, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2001, 185-187.

<sup>25</sup> Cardwell M., *Rural Development in the European Community: Charting a New Course*, Drake Journal of Agricultural Law, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2008, 34-36.

<sup>26</sup> Nwotite A., *the last question: Do the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions 1949, Really Protect?* Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence, Vol. 13 No. 1, 2022, 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> ICRC <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/fundamental-principles-red-cross-commentary> «The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary » (Access: 25.09.2025).

trend: not only are children continuing to suffer in this war, but they are also becoming increasingly affected, both physically and psychologically, as the conflict endures.<sup>28</sup>



This is just the beginning, because the true number of all the casualties is not known and likely is higher than is expected.<sup>29</sup> On certain days, casualty numbers exceed what typically occurs over entire months. Given the current escalation, Ukraine is approaching Saudi Arabia’s levels of child fatalities.<sup>30</sup>

**Child Casualties in Ukraine (as of November 18, 2024)**

Category	Description	Value
Total child casualties	Since Feb 2022	2,520 children
– Killed	Included above	669 children
– Injured	Included above	1,854 children
Year-over-year increase	2024 vs 2023	+57%
Weekly average casualties	At least 16 children killed or injured per week	16/week
Children affected by loss	1 in 5 lost a family member or friend	20%
Mental health impact	Adolescents feeling deep sadness or hopelessness	~33%

The data suggests that the impact of the war on children in Ukraine is not only ongoing but intensifying. With a 57% increase in child casualties in 2024 compared to 2023, and an average of at least 16 children harmed every week, it is clear that children remain extremely vulnerable on the frontlines. The fact that 1 in 5 children has lost a loved one, and that one-third of adolescents report severe emotional distress, indicates a deepening mental health crisis that could

<sup>28</sup> statista <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/> «Number of civilian casualties in Ukraine during Russia’s invasion verified by OHCHR from February 24, 2022 to July 31, 2025» (Access: 25.09.2025).

<sup>29</sup> Unicef <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/significant-increase-number-children-killed-across-ukraine-year-deadly-attacks> « Significant increase in number of children killed across Ukraine this year, as deadly attacks continue » 2024, (Access: 25.09.2025).

<sup>30</sup> Savethechildren <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/ukraine-more-children-killed-and-injured-past-five-days-all-january> « Ukraine: More children killed and injured in past five days than in all of January» 2025, (Access: 25.09.2025).

have long-term consequences. Unless meaningful protective and psychological interventions are scaled up, this generation may carry lasting scars far beyond the physical toll of war.<sup>31</sup>

These chart numbers aren't just statistics—they represent the lost generation who should have been building Ukraine's bright future. It's crucial that everyone understands this reality. Today's Ukrainian crisis could become tomorrow's reality for any nation. Russia's conduct ensures that no country remains entirely protected from the prospect of future unnecessary conflicts.

## SUMMARY

Ukrainian Children are called “lost generation”—not because they are truly lost, but because there is a risk of losing them if society fail to act. The children of Ukraine, like those in many conflict zones, are not just victims of war—they are witnesses to the world's failure to uphold its own promises. The Geneva Conventions were written to protect them, yet words alone cannot stop a missile, reunite a family, or heal trauma.

The stark reality confronts us with undeniable evidence: 2,520 Ukrainian children have been killed or injured since February 2022, with casualties increasing by 57% in 2024 alone. Every week, at least 16 children are killed or injured—a rate that transforms daily suffering into monthly tragedies. Beyond these statistics lie 5.1 million displaced children, 1,600 destroyed schools, and 786 damaged healthcare facilities. One in five children has lost a family member or friend, while one-third of adolescents report severe sadness or hopelessness.

These numbers reveal more than humanitarian crisis—they expose the systematic failure of international law when political power overrides legal obligations. Russia's deliberate targeting of hospitals marked with Red Cross symbols demonstrates how protective emblems become targets rather than shields. The Geneva Convention's child protection mechanisms, designed as humanity's covenant transcending all divisions, crumble when major powers simply refuse compliance.

What society is facing is not merely the breakdown of legal frameworks, but the weaponization of childhood itself. What is needed now is not more declarations—but real action. Protecting children in war today means securing shared future. It means confronting impunity, demanding accountability, and investing in humanitarian solutions that prioritize children's safety, well-being, and dignity. This requires moving beyond traditional diplomatic channels that have proven inadequate, developing enforcement mechanisms that function independently of violating parties' cooperation, and creating protection systems that cannot be politically undermined.

The cost of inaction extends far beyond individual tragedy. Ukraine's birth rate has declined by 35% since 2021, while an entire generation develops with psychological scars that will echo through decades. Today's traumatized children become tomorrow's leaders, parents, and citizens—their healing becomes Ukraine's healing, their recovery determines the nation's capacity for reconstruction and peace.

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<sup>31</sup> Vatican news, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2025-02/child-casualties-in-ukraine-2024-up-by-57-percent.html> « Child casualties in Ukraine in 2024 up by 57 percent » (Access: 25.09.2025).

Society shouldn't stand by while another generation grows up scarred by conflict, robbed of childhood and hope. Courage should be chosen over silence and responsibility over indifference. Because a generation lost to war is a future lost to peace—and no one can afford that. The lost can't be brought back, but the remaining can be fought for. The time for action is now, before "lost" becomes irreversible, and before Ukraine's children become the world's permanent reminder of how legal protections mean nothing without the will to enforce them.

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