

# Prioritizing school enrolments for Ukraine refugee children in Moldova, Poland and Romania

## September 2023

### CONTEXT

**For hundreds of thousands of children affected by the war in Ukraine, this new school year will be their fifth year of interrupted education;** the first two were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the third and fourth by the war, with potential for more years of interruption to follow.

An estimated 1.3 million children have fled to the European Union, where they have been offered protection following the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in March 2022<sup>1</sup>. This directive, which applies to Poland and Romania, stipulates that “Member States shall grant to persons under 18 years of age enjoying temporary protection access to the education system under the same conditions as nationals of the host Member State”<sup>2</sup>. Similarly in Moldova, school aged children from Ukraine who have applied for Temporary Protection can enroll and attend local schools.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, at the end of 2022/2023 academic year, a worryingly high number of children from Ukraine who have fled to neighboring countries were not in school. In Poland, which hosts the highest number of refugees from Ukraine, 56 % of school aged children from Ukraine were not studying in Polish schools.<sup>4</sup> In Moldova a mere 4% of school aged children from Ukraine were enrolled in schools by the end of the 2022-2023 school year, while in Romania only 10% of school aged refugee children from Ukraine were attending Romanian schools.<sup>5</sup>

### CHALLENGES

Of the approximately 390,000 school-age children and adolescents who have fled the war in Ukraine, currently residing in Moldova, Poland and Romania, approximately 250,600 are not consistently accessing or actively participating in face-to-face, certified education opportunities potentially available to them.

For thousands of children, online education has been their main learning modality over recent years, negatively affecting their psychological wellbeing and learning outcomes, and limiting opportunities for social interaction with host-country peers.<sup>6</sup> **In person schooling helps child development and supports their mental health and well-being by building their social skills, their relationships with**

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR\\_ASYTPSM\\_\\_custom\\_6823572/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYTPSM__custom_6823572/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>2</sup> Article 14, Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0055&qid=1648223587338>

<sup>3</sup> Moldova Temporary Protection Update, August 2023: Ukraine Situation: Moldova - Temporary Protection Update No. 3 | 7 August 2023 - Moldova | ReliefWeb

<sup>4</sup> [Ukrainian refugee students in the Polish education system \(ceo.org.pl\)](https://ceo.org.pl/ukrainian-refugee-students-in-the-polish-education-system)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> At school, online, in a vacuum? Where are the young refugees? CEO, June 2023 <https://ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/At-school-online-in-a-vacuum.-Where-are-the-young-refugees.pdf>

**peers and their ability to interact with broader society**<sup>7</sup>. This is particularly important for younger children and for refugees to integrate with their host societies. There are also protection and integration concerns associated with having a large cohort of school age students who are hard to reach and whose daily participation in online learning is nearly impossible to verify.

However, families from Ukraine report continuing to prioritize online education via the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)'s platform over education opportunities in hosting countries, for fear of losing access to or not being recognized by the Ukrainian education system. Many refugee parents do not have access to detailed information about education options available and benefits and disadvantages of each option in host countries, as well as clarity on educational pathways in order to make informed decisions.

**Families also report systemic barriers in the host countries preventing them from accessing or being retained in education..** Specifically, these families have expressed difficulties linked to a shortage of bridging and Romanian language courses, a lack of information regarding enrollment procedures and accessing support services, as well as unmet social and emotional needs within classrooms. Teachers and educators in host countries also face capacity challenges, particularly concerning their ability to identify and refer students in need of professional psychosocial support, teaching multi-lingual classes and promoting multicultural learning.

## RESPONSE TO DATE

Inclusion of children from Ukraine in national education systems has been the main priority of the response in hosting countries. Other educational pathways, such as those aimed at retaining a link with the education system in Ukraine via online and face-to-face measures, are also being supported where appropriate.

The Ukrainian MoES provides several options for displaced school-aged children currently outside of Ukraine. These include enrolling in the host country school, studying in both education systems (host country and Ukrainian system online) or if allowed by local legislation to study only in Ukrainian schools online.<sup>8</sup> It has confirmed<sup>9</sup> that their learning outcomes and achievements will be recognised upon return to the Ukrainian education system.

MoESs in the hosting countries have created policy and funding frameworks to allow all children and adolescents to access education, but these are not well-supported or operational at school level. Education partners have concentrated efforts on supporting mechanisms to address access-related barriers to formal education, particularly supporting preparatory, bridging and language classes, training and placing Cross-Cultural teaching Assistants in classrooms, and provision of learning materials. The Moldovan Ministry of Education and Research issued a Decree<sup>10</sup> in early September 2023 pertaining to the enrolment and registration of Ukrainian children and adolescents in national

---

<sup>7</sup> A survey of children from Ukraine carried out by Save the Children last year found "a direct relationship between school attendance and children's reported sense of wellbeing and belonging" amongst those surveyed. *This is my life*, Save the Children p.4, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/mDuTt08/>.

<sup>8</sup> Nakaz-MON-vid-15.05.2023-563.pdf.pdf (eo.gov.ua)

<sup>9</sup> Arrangement for Cooperation on Education between the European Commission and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 15 June 2023. [https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/document/7feb877e-3cc0-4302-94f3-d3436aee293f\\_en](https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/document/7feb877e-3cc0-4302-94f3-d3436aee293f_en).

<sup>10</sup> [https://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/05092023131733\\_3719.pdf](https://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/05092023131733_3719.pdf)

systems. This Instruction states enrolment in Moldovan schools is not mandatory and the online learning option remains. The terms of this Decree request schools to facilitate access to online learning for those wishing to study the Ukrainian curriculum, but in a school-based setting. This comprehensive document also provides direct links to enrolment and registration forms, as well as the identification and document requirements to help facilitate enrolment. Anticipated challenges remain in disseminating the contents of this Instruction to schools and parents and caregivers. In Poland, the MoES together with UNICEF issued nationwide The Continue Learning Campaign (CLC) with a particular focus on scaling up access to quality education for all refugee children and youth from Ukraine in Poland. Strong efforts have also been made towards wide-spread teacher training, particularly on quality inclusion and integration of all children within classrooms, creating safe and protective learning spaces, as well as provision of Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) services in schools and mainstreaming psychosocial support in classroom practice.

**More efforts are needed to prepare for and support all children and adolescents in hosting countries to access and participate in face-to-face education in the 2023/24 school year.**

## **ACTION NEEDED**

**Many refugee children are at risk of losing another one or more school years if they are not better supported to enroll in the national school system.** We are calling for a renewed sense of urgency, and action among host country governments and donors to ensure all refugee children from Ukraine can enroll in and attend school in national systems as soon as possible.

## **EU and donors**

- The EU and bilateral donors should financially support national governments and local authorities to expand school capacity and offer age-disaggregated reception/preparatory classes (maximum 15 students) available to all refugee children from Ukraine which foster social integration and basic host community language mastery.
- The EU together with the MoES in Ukraine should maximize the quality and compatibility of education in host countries and the country of origin, including by putting in place uniform directives on recognition of learning completed outside Ukraine if re-joining the Ukrainian system.
- States hosting fewer refugees should provide information to refugees in states hosting higher numbers to help them make informed decisions about their place of residence. This could be coordinated amongst EU Member States by the European Solidarity Mechanism.

## **Education authorities in hosting countries**

- National integration strategies must be enhanced in line with contextual challenges, and investments made in additional resources to immediately implement the strategy in preparation for the 2023-24 and subsequent school years. Resources must include financial support for cross-cultural assistants and the expansion of overall school capacity.
- Clear and transparent education pathways must be established for all children, including full enrolment in national systems (avoiding “audients” who don’t have access to certification) and detailed and accessible information on the recognition of learning from host countries if they return to Ukraine

- It is essential to hire additional trained teachers for schools which have large numbers of refugee children and/or to ensure that there are trained cross-cultural teaching assistants in place. National in-service training programs for teachers on integration strategies must be enhanced, recognizing the strain already placed on teachers and their wellbeing needs.
- Schools must be supported to ensure MHPSS is mainstreamed in classrooms and schools to mitigate long-term effects of trauma.
- Children and caregivers should receive accurate information on their education options, whether in their host country or elsewhere, and provide support to help them make decisions in their child's individual best interest. This should take into account their age (e.g. older children completing high school compared with younger children), the availability of education in their place of residence and when they arrived from Ukraine.
- Efforts to provide Ukrainian children with education should be extended to refugees and migrants of other nationalities, and do not risk discriminating against other groups of people seeking protection in Europe.
- Ministries of Education in Ukraine, Poland and Romania, based on the memorandums of understanding, to identify solutions for the professional integration of refugees with a teaching and pedagogical background in order to support host countries' education systems.
- Ministries of Education in refugee hosting countries should revise school policies to support preventive measures against bullying and discrimination, and create platforms to support school-based social cohesion efforts.

### Education stakeholders and civil society actors

- Education stakeholders and authorities must drastically increase provision of support activities during summer (language acquisition and language bridging programs, catch-up support and MHPSS provision) to prepare new children to enroll in formal schools and to support already enrolled children to remain in education.
- Stakeholders should work closely with local communities to help identify out-of-school children and provide their families with accurate information about their education options and recognition of learning.
- The needs and voices of school principals and head teachers should be amplified to ensure that school level needs and challenges are well-understood at a national level.
- Specialized education organisations and institutions should work closely with schools and local authorities to provide expert support, for example MHPSS support, where needed.
- Teachers and education personnel In addition, They must also be trained to reduce bias and promote social cohesion in the classroom.
- Strengthen and invest in teacher training and professional development in crisis contexts, including adequate training on PSS and socio-emotional learning (SEL).