Back to School 2023-2024:
Report on Education for children displaced by the conflict in Ukraine at the start of the second school year.
September 2023

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Humanitarian organizations are actively engaged in delivering educational support to children displaced in Ukraine and host countries by the conflict. As Ukraine and host country governments strive to deliver education to all children, it must be recognized that:

- humanitarian organizations play a critical role in ensuring that displaced, vulnerable children receive education and psycho-social support integral to their development.

- Learning in school settings is vital for children’s mental health, social development and academic achievement, therefore education must be fully funded in the humanitarian response.

- Most displaced Ukrainian children are schooled through online learning. Barriers to in-person learning must be addressed by Ukraine and host governments to shift the degree of reliance on online learning.

- Humanitarian learning hubs that integrate education, protection and mental health and psycho-social support for Ukrainian students and parents demonstrate the necessity to adopt a wholistic approach in the formal school system to effectively meet the needs of displaced children.

Glossary

- CP – Child Protection
- CSO – Civil Society Organization
- EIE – Education in Emergencies
- EC – the European Commission
- EU – the European Union
- MES – Ukraine Ministry of Education and Science
- MER – Moldova Ministry of Education and Research
- MHPSS – Mental Health and Psycho-social Support
- NGO – Non-government organization
- OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- TP – Temporary Protection Policy
- UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees
- UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
- WV – World Vision International
- WVG – World Vision Georgia
2. INTRODUCTION

The escalation of the conflict in February 2022 led to an unprecedented large-scale displacement of children and their families in Ukraine both in and abroad to countries in Europe.

In June 2023 according to UNHCR, 6.3 million Ukrainian refugees were living across the globe and more than 5 million displaced within Ukraine.

Coupled with the preceding COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict has resulted in a fourth year where serious learning deficits among kindergarten and primary aged children are evident, in spite of the Ukrainian government’s efforts to deliver education online. Ukrainian refugees are welcomed in host countries, however viable solutions to absorbed Ukrainian students in school systems are proving complex and difficult. Consequently, at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year, many children in Ukraine and host countries are not part of formal school systems.

This paper asserts that humanitarian organizations will continue to be vital in ensuring millions of children receive educational and mental health support critical to their development. Learning in a school setting is vital to children’s mental health, positive social development and academic achievement, therefore education must be fully funded in the humanitarian response. Barriers to in-person learning must be addressed by Ukraine and host governments to shift the degree of reliance on online learning. Humanitarian learning hubs that integrate education, protection and mental health and psycho-social support for Ukrainian students and parents, demonstrate the necessity to adopt a wholistic approach education in the formal school system, to effectively meet the needs of displaced children.

World Vision’s aspiration for children:

“Educated for life and to ensure children impacted or affected by crisis or disaster have continued access to quality, equitable, nurturing and protective educational”
3. COUNTRY SITUATIONS

The General Situation

Ukraine’s educational institutions are facing breaking point as the conflict continues. Since the start of the conflict in 2014, there has been over 3,300 attacks on educational institutions and 361 destroyed, comprising universities, schools, and kindergartens. These attacks that began in Eastern Ukraine have destroyed, damaged or forced the closure of more than 750 schools, consequently disrupted the education for thousands of children.

At the start of the new phase of the conflict in February 2022, 350,000 children in that region had no access to schools. Within five months 1,888 schools were damaged or destroyed by shelling and bombing, more than twice the number of the previous years.

This trend of destruction continues mainly in the east, not far from active conflict and areas under the Russian Federation control. World Vision found clear evidence of the tragic impact on children and their families living in Dnipro, Kharkiv and Kherson, many of whom found learning difficult as they fear separation from their families. In addition to these attacks, many schools lack shelter facilities. UNICEF estimates that approximately 40% of all educational facilities lack bomb shelters, of which 30% are secondary schools.

Land mines and explosive ordinances in the eastern oblasts where the conflict is greatest, also result in learning losses for children. The combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict are causing significant learning deficits for children. According to OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2023, approximately 71% of Ukrainian children aged 3-17 access to quality education is negatively impacted by the escalation of the war. Approximately half of school aged children are relying on online learning or a blend of online and in person classes. Hundreds of thousands of pre-school age children have not been able to start attending kindergarten.

The situation is also dire for teachers, especially those displaced by the conflict. Nearly two-thirds of the country’s children are internally displaced along with 43,000 teachers. Mental, emotional and physical toll the conflict has placed on students and teachers are enormous. Women constitute over 80% of the country’s teaching profession, many of whom carry additional responsibility of family care, as men are conscripted to military service. These increased responsibilities for teachers with families pose a greater challenge for them to continue working effectively.
Achievements and Gaps

Attacks on schools constitute one of six grave violations against children in armed conflict according to the United Nations. Ukraine was listed among those countries, in the UN Secretary General’s report where grave violations were evident in 2022. The government subsequently signed a joint prevention plan with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children. This plan is a voluntary commitment that covers the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. In November 2019, Ukraine endorsed the Safe School Declaration, an intergovernmental agreement to protect education in armed conflict. The Declaration requires, among other things, that states develop and promote good practices for protecting schools and universities in conflict, as well as establish guidance on concrete measures that armed forces and armed non-state actors can take to deter military use of educational facilities and reduce the risks of attacks. Although the Declaration is not international law, it is an important instrument for setting global standards and norms to protect children in war conditions.

In anticipation of the start of this school year, the Ukraine Ministry of Education and Science (MES) announcement a new initiative, “Schools, we are together!” to create safe, comfortable learning environments for children. This initiative includes measures, such as the option for municipalities to use full-time in-person classes, online learning or a blend as appropriate, while avoiding doubling the workload for teachers and students; expanding services to pre-school children through school construction or bus service to schools with shelters, as well as additional equipment and school materials for teachers and students.

Ukrainian students living in host countries can enroll in formally recognized schools and pursue some courses, while maintaining 6-8 hours weekly contact with the Ukrainian system.

WHAT WORLD VISION IS DOING

Humanitarian organizations, including World Vision, play a vital role in supporting education in Ukraine. Of the 428,690 children that received lifesaving support from World Vision since the start of the response, 221,056 participate in educational activities, in locations across the country. Educational services include safe spaces for learning and recreation, material support to students and schools, teacher training, as well as mental health and protection services to both children and their parents. The benefits are both immediate and longer term for parents are certain of a safe place for their children to stay during school hours, where they can learn and play. Mothers are also given a retreat to support and empower each other to cope with the conflict. Not least of all, young children receive pre-school education, which would otherwise not exist.

Testimonies


Art Therapy for mental health: Teacher promotes the incredible role of art for healing and mental health | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)
General Situation

Moldova shares borders with Ukraine, consequently, has significant economic and social ties. A non-EU member with a population of 4.2 million, Moldova received highest per capita of Ukrainian refugees, with over half a million entering the country since the start of the conflict. It is estimated at 101,000 Ukrainians currently reside in Moldova of whom 46% percent are children. To regularize the legal status of Ukrainians in the country, the government introduced the Temporary Protection (TP) status for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. Although not initially imposed, enrolling in schools is becoming a pre-condition for access to social services. The Moldova Ministry of Education and Research (MER) allows enrollment of Ukrainian children before the introduction of the TP in March.

Most Ukrainian children in Moldova are not enrolled into schools, consequently they are not part of the mainstream education system.

In July, of the 49,634 Ukrainian children in the country, 1,847 were enrolled. According to UN Human Rights Moldova, 2,420 refugee children from Ukraine were enrolled in the 2022-2023 academic year in schools and kindergartens, including those in the Transnistrian region.

Although there are differences in both enrollment figures, they represent less than 5% of the overall number of Ukrainian children in Moldova. Most children reportedly are reliant on online classes offered by the Ukraine government. This is likely to continue in the new academic year 2023-2024, making it a fourth year of online learning.

Achievements and Gaps

The complexity of absorbing Ukrainian students into the education system goes beyond school enrollment. According to UNESCO, the policy pathways for positive change for Ukrainian students are limited, more so for school directors, teachers and psychologists to ensure student well-being, as well as for teachers to ensure participation and provide additional assistance. Besides these policy challenges, the ministry is tackling the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in widening the academic performance gap between Moldovan students from privileged and disadvantaged households. Low enrollment is also due to refugees’ resistance to replacing the Ukrainian curriculum. The Education Working Group led by UNICEF and MER, recognize this challenge to enrollment, due mainly to parents and students’ perception that educational standards in Moldova is lower than Ukraine’s, as well
as language barriers. According to the latest UNICEF OECD assessment of education standards among Eastern Europe and Central Asian countries, Moldova was among the lowest performers in reading, math and science and further behind when compared to EU countries. An encouraging sign of progress is that in December 2022 the Ukrainian and Moldovan Governments made an agreement to strengthen and expand bilateral partnership in higher education based on equality and mutual benefit. Approved by the Ukraine Parliament in March 2023, this agreement paves the way for scholarships to universities in both countries, as well as facilitate academic mobility for university students, academic staff.

WHAT WORLD VISION IS DOING

The humanitarian community is actively engaged in supporting MER through provision of equipment, materials to schools and school supplies for needy children from both Ukraine and host communities. By equipping schools with computers, desk and chairs Ukrainian students can follow Ukraine online courses in Moldovan schools, while adjusting to their new school environment. World Vision is supporting the educational needs of Ukrainian children and local schools. For example, with a local partner Communitas and funding from Disaster Emergency Committee non-formal education, mental health, and psychosocial support, as well as access to online learning are provided in most of the 32 districts across the country. Early education is critical for preparing young children for education. Day care for kindergarten age children is provided by local partner, Step by Step with funding from World Vision Korea and support services for mothers. These educational projects integrated with protection and mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) have benefited 8,656 children. Since the start of the response 98,114 children have been reached by WV.

The Moldovan government is committed to providing education for Ukrainian students but lacks the resources for achieving this successfully in the short term. With no immediate end in sight to the conflict, longer term solutions for ensuring Ukrainian children’s education must be found. In the interim, the humanitarian community including World Vision is playing an important role in preventing learning losses.

Testimonies

Child Friendly spaces for children: Child-friendly spaces in Moldova bring positive change to Ukrainian children’s lives | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)
The General Situation

The government of Romania granted 139,875 refugees from Ukraine temporary protection, the largest number of refugees in the country’s modern history. In July this year UNHCR recorded 95,639 Ukrainian refugees in the country with children accounting for approximately 40%. As the conflict in Ukraine expands in regions close to Romania, more Ukrainians are expected, since Romania maintains open borders to receive those seeking refuge.

At the start of the conflict Romania, like other EU member states, adopted the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in June 2022 for immediate protection from refoulement and ensure basic standards of treatment for refugees, including access to accommodation, labor market, and social and health services. A year later the government introduced a new policy to replace the 50/20 program, a key component of the TPD that gave funding to Ukrainians and host families/institutions accommodation and basic needs. Under the new temporary protection regulations children must be registered in educational programs recognized by the Ministry of Education as a pre-condition to receiving social assistance.

As a result, more than 26,000 children were registered in educational programs by July, however only a small percent of this group are enrolled into the formal school system.

Achievements and Gaps

During the 2022-2023 academic year most Ukrainian students relied on the Ukraine Government online learning facility to maintain connection with their home country. Many of these children attended education hubs provided by humanitarian organizations, including World Vision. In these spaces they receive additional education and recreational activities with other children to supplement online learning. An estimated 9,000 recognized education hubs exist across the country run mainly by NGOs.

Availability of online learning in the next academic year will be important for most Ukrainian students not yet enrolled in the Romanian school system, though it has significant limitations. With the ongoing conflict in Ukraine internet connectivity is often weak.
and disrupts learning for students and teachers alike. One of the biggest challenges for many students is focusing on a screen for an extended period, so there is a greater chance of them being distracted, especially with a difficult lesson. Online courses are televised mainly in a live classroom setting, placing greater pressure on the teacher to effectively engage two audiences. Addressing doubts online is not easy for students, especially those who are reticent to speak out. Students learn a lot being with their peers in the classroom, which is lost in online learning settings, this could result in a sense of isolation. UNICEF in coordination with the humanitarian community approach to this 2023-2024 academic year as a transition period towards scaling up absorption of Ukrainian students to the Romanian school system, while retaining learning hubs for longer-term supplementary educational, integration and recreational support for newly arrivals and longer-term refugees.

**WHAT WORLD VISION IS DOING**

Often referred to as Happy Bubble, World Vision Romania provides a safe learning and recreational space for children and their parents, coupled with protection and psychosocial support, in most of its fifteen locations throughout the country. Trained facilitators and psychologists at these centers carry out disability assessments, parent counselling, art therapy and other activities, designed to restore children and their parents’ well-being. Language classes in English and Romanian are given to all ages groups to enable to integrate into Romanian society. Many of the staff and volunteers at the Happy Bubbles are Ukrainian refugees, which strengthen children’s sense of security and aid in their adjustment to a new life in Romania.

World Vision supports the position that children must be enrolled in the formal school system and works with humanitarian partners to this end. Notwithstanding this, community-based response services like Happy Bubbles will continue to have an important role as Ukrainian refugees enter and stay in Romania.

**Testimonies**

Provision of laptops to over 1,000 children - [Over 1,000 laptops from New Zealand’s Ministry boost Ukrainian children’s education in Romania | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)]

Ukraine Youth in Romania benefit from entrepreneurial training: [Financial education boosts interest of Ukrainian children in Romania to become future entrepreneurs | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)]

Happy Bubbles a learning space for Ukrainian children: [World Vision’s Happy Bubble is a happy learning space for Ukrainian children in Romania | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)]
The General Situation

Since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, over 160,000 refugees entered Georgia. By October 2022, the numbers reduced to an average of 25,000. Many came from Mariupol and Kharkiv when these regions were severely attacked. Georgia continues to maintain an open border and extended its visa free policy for citizens of Ukraine for up to two years.

Georgia hosts approximately 6000 Ukrainian refugee children. By the end of the first academic year 2022-23, over 2,000 Ukrainian students were enrolled in schools.

Achievements and Gaps

The government of Georgia has been proactive to removing barriers to education for Ukrainian students. For instance, Ukrainian students who wish to enroll in Georgian schools are offered free language courses at the municipal level in major cities, such as Tbilisi and Batumi. In August 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science announced that Ukrainian students with accreditation may enroll in Georgian universities without having to sit qualifying exams. During the academic year, students up to grade 11 could be enrolled in schools, while continuing their studies in Ukrainian schools remotely and taking end of year exams online. These facilities were the outcome of agreements between the governments of Ukraine and Georgia to assure continued education for Ukrainian students.

Most children are in some form of education, but only a few are enrolled in schools to receive in-person education. Low school attendance can present protection risks for children. Through focused group discussions recently organized by UNHCR, Ukrainian children said they found learning Georgian difficult, they were more comfortable with Ukrainian teachers and classmates, and believed that they will return to Ukraine soon. They were less informed than their counterparts who attended schools and integrated in their locations, as they knew more about extracurricular activities and other free services that are available. Parents’ indecisiveness about their future and perceived good quality of online education, also contribute to children not being enrolled.

Humanitarian organizations have adopted measures to address resistance and encourage enrollment in public schools, since the end of the conflict in Ukraine does not appear to have an immediate end.
WHAT WORLD VISION IS DOING

Education and protection support for Ukrainian children and their families by humanitarian organizations is a bridge to enabling integration into Georgian society. From the outset of the crisis, World Vision Georgia (WVG) has been at the forefront of giving life-saving support to over 17,000 Ukrainian refugees. Access to quality education is fundamental to the response, to this end WV has given educational materials to educational institutions that cater to Ukrainian children. The Happy Centers in Tbilisi and Batumi offer children and their parents safe places to receive educational, recreational, protection and mental health support. Additionally, WVG and the Teachers Professional Development Center have taken steps to equip Ukrainian language teachers with the skills necessary to teach the Georgian language to Ukrainian students. This initiative is currently ongoing.

Testimonies

WV and UNHCR cooperation to assist over 16K in Georgia

Over a year on, ADH, UNHCR and World Vision assist over 16K refugees in Georgia with life-saving initiatives | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)
4. CONCLUSION

Education is a basic human right that states are duty bound to provide to all children within their territories. This is a collective effort for not only governments, but also humanitarian and civil society organizations. Through cooperation and coordinated efforts, displaced Ukrainian and vulnerable children can be educated. Parents also have a pivotal part in ensuring that children are educated. While immediate solutions for absorbing Ukrainian refugee students remain elusive, humanitarian organizations like World Vision are fully committed supporting education with the belief that all children have a right to education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision believes that all children, especially the most vulnerable, should receive education, either through formal or non-formal education pathways; education that is of quality, inclusive, relevant, meaningful and protective.

The Government of Ukraine must:

- Continue to abide by its commitment to protect education during armed conflict having endorsed the Safe School Declaration in 2019. This inter-governmental commitment expresses the government’s support protecting students, teacher, schools and universities from attacks, continuation of education during armed conflict and implementation of concrete measures to deter the military use of schools.
- Recognize and cooperate with humanitarian organizations delivering educational support to displaced children and other vulnerable children and young people.
- Make institutionalization a last resort for displaced and separated children, as well as children living with disabilities.
- Introduce and expand school programs aimed at preventing and addressing anti-social social behaviors among host community and displaced students.
- Pursue efforts for peace and cessation of grave violations against children’s rights.

Host Countries must:

- Ensure effective implementation of national language courses for students and increase the availability of these courses to prepare Ukrainian students for entry into schools.
- Widen enrollment facility to accommodate Ukrainian students in schools throughout the academic year. Make this a priority to facilitate progressive enrollment of all refugee children and in coordination with local school authorities. This applies to all levels including kindergarten and after-school activities. A key aspect of enrollment is a comprehensive awareness raising campaign for parents with information on requirements and procedures for enrolling their children to schools. Ensure that refugee children have access to textbooks, school supplies, and any additional educational resources they may need.
- Develop programs and activities that promote social integration and interaction with the local community. Implement anti-bullying programs and policies to create a safe and inclusive school environment for all students.
- Establish and formalize effective transition programs for refugee children, such as the audient system, that prepare them for enrolment into the national school system. In addition, parents, especially new arrivals, must be made aware of these programs and advantages they offer for continued learning and adaptation to a new environment.
- Develop long-term integration pathways that consider the prospects of refugee children, including vocational training, higher education opportunities.
- Make allowances and support students wishing to continue with Ukrainian curriculum through online learning, with complimentary measures for dual learning, such as along-side learning based on the host country’s curriculum, and after-school activities.
Ensure all Ukrainian high school students can register for baccalaureate exams in the host country’s school system and access to scholarships and other systems of support. Conduct a nationwide information campaign targeted at students and parents to enable them to successfully enroll in higher education institutions.

Develop and implement teacher training programs and in-service training to strengthen teachers’ capacities in accommodating refugee students. This ought to be done in conjunction with an incentive system for schools and teachers that accommodate refugee students.

Accelerate the recognition and accreditation processes for Ukrainian refugee teachers to work in host countries, as support teachers and non-teaching staff to assist Ukrainian student’s adaptation to local schools.

Introduce and expand school programs aimed at preventing and addressing anti-social social behaviors among host community and displaced students.

Improve language training capacities in schools in areas, with standard school second language curriculum and incentives for teachers to be equipped in this area.

Essential social services, such as health, psychosocial support and services for students with special needs must be ensured as part of the multi-sectoral approach to education.

**Bi-lateral Donors and the EU must:**

- Ensure that education remains a key component of the humanitarian response, with financial support to national governments and local authorities to ensure that all students displaced by the conflict in Ukraine do not suffer loss of learning opportunities whether in Ukraine or in host countries.

- Ensure funding for education through humanitarian organizations’ support localization efforts, thereby making it easier for local CSO/NGOs delivering services in education to access international donor funding.

- Include in EU/EC information and coordinating mechanisms, such as the Ukraine Solidarity Platform, information on education, as well as promoting a greater level of uniformity among EU members around regulations and practices for ensuring students from Ukraine can access appropriate education.

- All EU members states establish agreements on Education with the Ukraine Government that establish pathways recognizing school accreditation and certification of Ukrainian students and teachers.

- Make school infrastructure a key part of funding Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction40 social protection and livelihoods plans.

**The UN, International and Local Humanitarian Organizations must:**

- Support efforts by host governments to remove barriers to Ukrainian children wishing to enter the school system at all levels.

- Support initiatives to strengthen school capacities with technical and material resources to enable schools to accept Ukrainian students.

- Provide training and capacity-building programs for educators, school staff, and volunteers to enhance their ability to support refugee children effectively. This can include training on trauma-informed teaching, language instruction, and cultural sensitivity.

- Actively engage in coordination platforms, such as the Education Cluster/Working group to optimize capacities in delivering educational support.

- Consistently aim to integrate protection, mental health and psychosocial support in educational programs directly to beneficiaries and through operational partners.

- Make coordination efforts a priority, through the Education Cluster/Working group, and similar humanitarian networks.

- Support the Ukraine government in fulfilling its commitment to protecting schools as outlined in the UN Partnership Agreement41 and Safe Schools Declaration.
ENDNOTES

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5 Attacks on Schools in Ukraine Endangering Children’s Lives | Save the Children
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universities from the worst effects of armed conflict (protectingeducation.org)
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34 Civil Georgia | Ukrainians Now Able to Enroll in Georgian Universities Without National Exams
35 UNHCR Georgia mid-year protection monitoring report.pdf
36 How Ukrainian Teen Refugee Girls Live in Georgia | UNICEF Georgia
37 Over a year on, ADH, UNHCR and World Vision assist over 16K refugees in Georgia with life-saving initiatives | Ukraine | World Vision International (wvi.org)
38 Safe Schools Declaration | Right to Education Initiative (right-to-education.org)
39 Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment (worldbank.org)
40 The Government of Ukraine signs plan to end and prevent grave violations against children, with the support of the
United Nations. – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

**For further information please contact:**

- **Chris Palusky**
  UCR Multi-Country Response Director
  E: chris_palusky@wvi.org

- **Cecil Laguardia**
  Communications Director
  E: cecil_laguardia@wvi.org

- **Denise Allen**
  Advocacy Advisor
  E: denise_allen@consultant.wvi.org

[https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/ukraine](https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/ukraine)