



## Needs Assessment

# INTEGRATED EDUCATION, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND CHILD PROTECTION **FOR CONFLICT-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN UKRAINE**

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

|              |                                                                    |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AAP</b>   | Accountability to Affected Populations                             |
| <b>CB</b>    | Capacity-building                                                  |
| <b>CBO</b>   | Community-Based Organization                                       |
| <b>CP</b>    | Child Protection                                                   |
| <b>EiE</b>   | Education in Emergencies                                           |
| <b>FGD</b>   | Focus Group Discussion                                             |
| <b>GDPR</b>  | General Data Protection Regulation                                 |
| <b>HIP</b>   | Humanitarian Implementation Plan                                   |
| <b>HNRP</b>  | Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan                               |
| <b>HRP</b>   | Humanitarian Response Plan                                         |
| <b>IASC</b>  | Inter-Agency Standing Committee                                    |
| <b>INGO</b>  | International Non-Governmental Organization                        |
| <b>IDP</b>   | Internally Displaced Person                                        |
| <b>INEE</b>  | Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies                  |
| <b>IRC</b>   | Inclusive Resource Centres                                         |
| <b>IOM</b>   | The International Organization for Migration                       |
| <b>KII</b>   | Key Informant Interview                                            |
| <b>MHPSS</b> | Mental Health and Psychosocial Support                             |
| <b>MNP</b>   | Multidisciplinary National Test                                    |
| <b>MoES</b>  | Ministry of Education and Science                                  |
| <b>NGO</b>   | Non-Governmental Organization                                      |
| <b>OCHA</b>  | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| <b>PFA</b>   | Psychological First Aid                                            |
| <b>PSEA</b>  | Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse                        |
| <b>PSD</b>   | Psychosocial Distress                                              |
| <b>PSS</b>   | Psychosocial Support                                               |
| <b>UCR</b>   | Ukraine Crisis Response                                            |
| <b>UNDP</b>  | United Nations Development Programme                               |
| <b>WV</b>    | World Vision                                                       |

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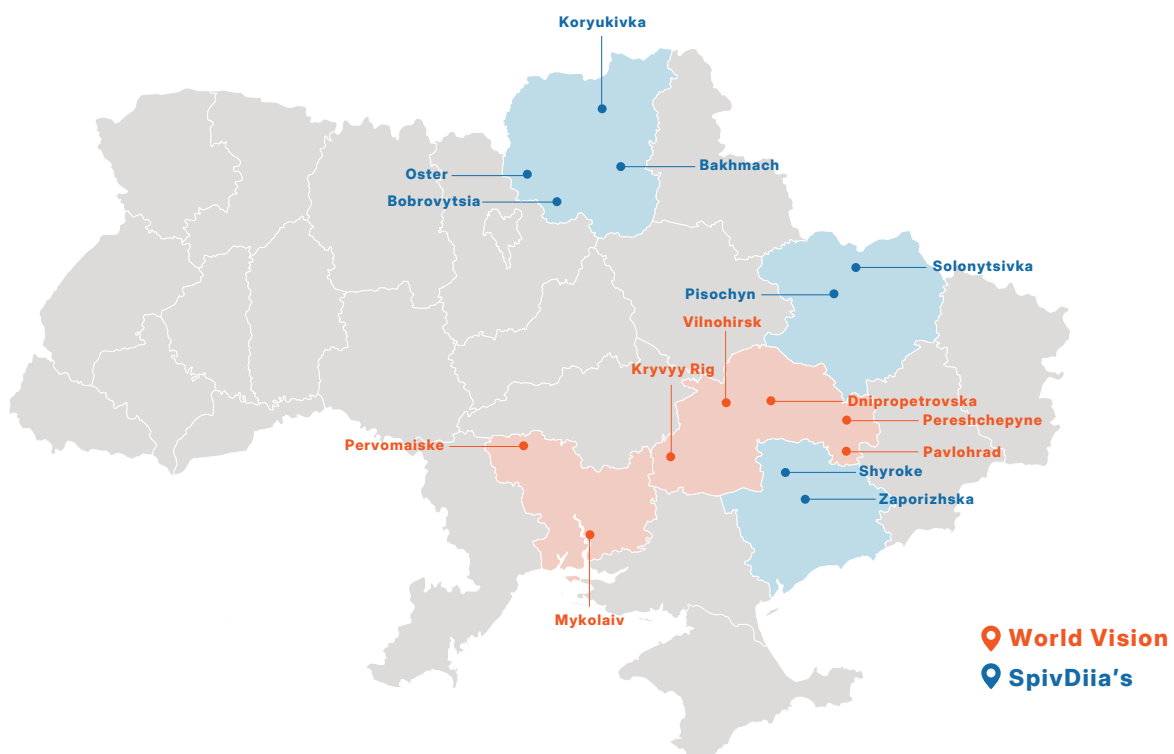
This assessment was conducted by World Vision Ukraine.

World Vision Ukraine expresses its sincere gratitude to the local partner, SpivDiia, as well as to partners across relevant ministries and national institutions, whose cooperation and insights informed both the fieldwork and the findings of this report.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This needs assessment was conducted by World Vision. The assessment examines Education in Emergencies (EiE) needs across five priority oblasts, Dnipropetrovska, Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, Zaporizka, and Chernihivska, focusing on children's ability to safely access, remain in, and benefit from education amid protracted conflict, recurrent displacement, and ongoing disruption.



The assessment is guided by key normative and coordination frameworks, including the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy (2023-2025), the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) Strategic Plan (to 2027), and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Pyramid. Findings are structured around EiE thematic pillars: Access, Quality, Protection/MHPSS, Teachers, and System Strengthening.

## **Assessment scope and methodology**

The assessment was implemented between September 2025 and January 2026, reflecting conditions during the 2024-2025 academic year and the first half of the 2025-2026 academic year, including seasonal and winter-related constraints. It applied a utilisation-focused, mixed-methods design combining secondary data review with primary quantitative and qualitative data collection. Primary data included: 19 school level needs assessments; 558 child surveys; 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and parents/caregivers; and 4 key informant interviews (KIIs) with national- and coordination-level stakeholders from the education, child protection (CP), and MHPSS sectors.

The needs assessment applied a utilization-focused, non-experimental mixed-methods approach designed to generate evidence that is directly usable for programme decision-making. A non-probability, school-based sampling approach was used due to access and security constraints. Qualitative data collection used a purposive and convenience sampling approach, targeting participants directly engaged with the assessed schools to ensure relevance and contextual depth. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential techniques (SPSS), while qualitative data were thematically coded and triangulated with secondary sources to strengthen analytical rigour. Ethical safeguards, child safeguarding protocols, and referral mechanisms were integrated throughout. Findings are indicative rather than population-representative and are intended to directly inform EiE programming priorities.

## **Rationale for geographic focus**

The five assessed oblasts were prioritised due to the severity and persistence of education disruption, proximity to frontlines or international borders, significant displacement and return dynamics, and documented risks to safe schooling. All five oblasts have experienced damage to education infrastructure, recurrent security incidents affecting school operations, and sustained reliance on online or blended learning modalities. They are also among the regions where landmines and unexploded ordnance have been reported in or near education facilities, amplifying access and protection risks. Collectively, these factors position the assessed oblasts among the most critical contexts for EiE intervention.

## **Priority constraints affecting safe access to education**

Across all assessed oblasts, the assessment identifies five interlinked constraints that most critically undermine children's safe, continuous access to education. These constraints are driven not only by the presence of insecurity, but by the unpredictable frequency, timing, and duration of shelling and air raid alerts, which repeatedly disrupt attendance, learning modalities, and protective functions of schools. From an EiE perspective, these constraints are access-enabling and life-saving priorities.

### ***Security risks and inadequate shelter conditions (Access | Protection - highest priority)***

Ongoing shelling, air raid alerts, and blast risks, characterised by sudden onset, variable duration, and repeated daily occurrence, remain the most immediate barrier to safe school attendance. Unpredictable alerts disrupt school routines, interrupt lessons, and frequently require prolonged sheltering, directly influencing parental decisions to keep children at home even when schools are officially open. Unsafe or damaged routes to school and the presence of explosive hazards further compound access risks.

While shelters are legally required, many are overcrowded, damp, poorly ventilated, and inadequately equipped, limiting their protective function during repeated or extended alerts. Variations in blast intensity and alert duration mean that learning is often suspended for indeterminate periods, undermining both safety and continuity. As a result, distance, and remote learning remain central, particularly in Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, Zaporizka, and Chernihivska, but function as risk-mitigation measures rather than preferred modalities.

### ***Psychosocial distress and protection risks affecting learning engagement (Protection | MHPSS)***

Frequent exposure to blasts, sirens, and emergency movements generates chronic fear, anxiety, and concentration difficulties, directly affecting attendance and children's capacity to engage with learning. The cumulative psychological impact of repeated alerts, rather than isolated incidents, emerges as a key driver of disengagement, particularly among younger children and internally displaced learners.

Schools play a critical protective role during emergencies; however, access to nonspecialised MHPSS remains limited due to shortages of psychologists and social workers. Although formal child protection referral pathways exist, low awareness and utilisation among children and caregivers mean that help-seeking often occurs through informal networks. In this context, protection and MHPSS are not ancillary services but preconditions for safe access and sustained participation in education. Learning loss driven by repeated disruption and modality shifts (Quality)

Despite high formal enrolment and grade progression, learning outcomes are significantly compromised. Recurrent blasts and alerts trigger repeated shifts between face-to-face, blended, and fully remote learning, fragmenting instructional time and limiting teacher-student interaction. These cumulative disruptions, rather than curriculum difficulty alone, drive widespread difficulties in lesson comprehension and foundational skill acquisition.

Demand for structured, curriculum-aligned catch-up education is consistently high across oblasts. However, participation and effectiveness are strongly conditioned by safety: families are less willing to engage in additional learning activities when blast risks are high, or shelter conditions are inadequate. Learning recovery therefore depends on both pedagogical quality and the predictability and safety of learning environments.

### ***Teacher capacity and wellbeing under sustained disruption (Teachers)***

Teachers operate under persistent strain linked to recurrent alerts, extended working hours, and the need to repeatedly adapt lesson plans to sudden disruptions. Burnout and emotional exhaustion directly affect instructional quality and limit teachers' capacity to support learning recovery and respond to children's psychosocial needs during and after emergencies.

Teachers consistently prioritise practical, workload-sensitive training on catch-up delivery, inclusive education, and integration of psychosocial support, alongside structured wellbeing support. In EiE contexts marked by blast variability, teacher wellbeing is a critical enabling factor for maintaining safe, responsive, and protective learning spaces.

### ***Caregiver stress, coordination gaps, and system constraints (System Strengthening)***

Caregivers play a central role in sustaining children's education during periods of insecurity but face significant psychosocial stress linked to ongoing shelling and uncertainty. Blast variability complicates daily decision-making around attendance, remote learning supervision, and engagement with schools. Limited awareness of protection and referral services further constrains caregivers' ability to seek timely support.

At system level, coordination challenges, staff shortages, and uneven dissemination of guidance reduce the capacity of education actors to respond consistently to fluctuating security conditions. Strengthening school-family collaboration, caregiver-focused psychoeducation, and alignment with national systems is essential to ensure that EiE responses remain adaptive, protective, and sustainable under volatile conditions.

## **Conclusion**

The assessment highlights that education in the assessed oblasts is characterised by high enrolment but fragile access, driven primarily by security risks, inadequate shelter conditions, psychosocial distress, learning loss from repeated modality shifts, and strained teacher capacity. Addressing safety, protection, and psychosocial constraints is a prerequisite for restoring and sustaining access to education. Integrated EiE responses are therefore required to simultaneously strengthen safe access, learning recovery, protection and MHPSS, teacher capacity and wellbeing, and system-level coordination, in alignment with national education frameworks.

# INTRODUCTION

This needs assessment was conducted by World Vision (WV), and focuses on EiE across five priority regions in Ukraine, with specific attention to the continuity of learning, and the conditions needed for safe, protective, and inclusive learning environments. It is conceptually aligned with EiE priorities (including access, quality, protection/MHPSS, teachers, and system support), and reflects relevant coordination and standards frameworks (e.g., Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy, INEE Minimum Standards, and MoES Strategic Plan (2027)), alongside a protection- and wellbeing-sensitive lens consistent with IASC MHPSS Pyramid. This report is structured as follows:

## 1.

### Needs Assessment

#### Objectives and Methodology

outline the purpose, scope, and core objectives of the assessment, and summarises the methodological framework, design, tools, sampling approach, data collection process, ethical considerations, data analysis approach (including triangulation), limitations, and a demographic profile of participants.

## 2.

### Findings

present consolidated results structured thematically and aligned to the analytical framework, triangulated across the desk review/secondary data, child and school surveys, Key Informant Interview (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with parents and teachers. Findings are presented in four sections:

- Overall crisis context and implications for education
- Geographic context of assessed areas
- Barriers to learning continuity and quality (participation/progression barriers; vulnerability, inclusion and protection-related barriers; workforce and caregiver constraints)
- Safe access to schooling and protection risks in and around schools (safety on the way to school; safety at school and protective environments).

## 3.

### Recommendations

translate priority needs into actionable, evidence-based recommendations organised under sub-headings aligned EiE pillars (Access, Quality, Protection/MHPSS, Teachers, and System Strengthening).

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the purpose and scope of the needs assessment and presents an overview of the methodological framework underpinning the study. It summarises the assessment approach and design, including the sampling frame, sample size, and demographic profile of participating respondents. It also describes the data collection process, ethical considerations, and the methods used for data management and analysis. Finally, it notes key limitations to support transparent interpretation of the findings.

## Purpose

The overall objective of this needs assessment was to generate a comprehensive understanding of education needs and protection risks affecting children in emergency education settings across the targeted oblasts. Specifically, the assessment aimed to:

- **Identify and prioritise vulnerable groups and schools** by highlighting learning spaces with high concentrations of displaced children, returnees, children with disabilities, children with special educational needs, children experiencing psychosocial distress, and children from socio-economically vulnerable households, ensuring that the needs of these groups drive analysis and recommendations.
- **Examine access to safe, inclusive, and protective education services** for girls and boys, including children with disabilities and other vulnerable learners, by identifying barriers related to gender, age, displacement status, disability, and exposure to conflict-related risks.
- **Assess learning continuity and learning gaps** in core subjects by examining how ongoing disruption has affected children's participation, progression, and ability to engage with education, with attention to implications for learning recovery and catch-up support.
- **Assess the safety, functionality, and emergency preparedness of schools**, including infrastructure conditions, shelters, heating, first-aid availability, mine risk awareness, emergency procedures, and the capacity of schools to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- **Identify key education- and protection-related risks** affecting children and teachers within schools and surrounding environments, including safety concerns, psychosocial stressors, child protection risks, and preparedness gaps linked to ongoing conflict.
- **Assess teachers' wellbeing, capacities, and support needs** in delivering safe and protective education, including training gaps, burnout risks, availability of psychosocial support, and preparedness to respond to protection concerns.
- **Examine the role of parents and caregivers** in supporting children's education and safety, including their engagement with schools, access to information, and the availability and effectiveness of feedback, complaints, and accountability mechanisms.

In addition, the findings will **inform the prioritisation and design of EiE interventions**, by identifying the most critical constraints that must be addressed to restore and sustain safe access to education.

## Scope

The needs assessment scope is defined across time, geography, and themes, to ensure findings are interpreted within the correct operational context and linked directly to EiE programming priorities.

- **Temporal scope:** Conducted September 2025-January 2026, reflecting needs and constraints across the 2024-2025 academic year and the first half of the 2025-2026 academic year (including seasonal/winter operational considerations).
- **Geographic scope:** Implemented in five Ukrainian priority regions (oblasts): Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, Zaporizka, Chernihivska, and Dnipropetrovska.
- **Thematic scope (EiE focus):** The assessment examined the conditions shaping children's education experience and outcomes in emergency settings, including: learning modality and continuity dynamics; school readiness and service delivery constraints; safety and protective learning environment factors (including relevant MHPSS considerations); and the enabling roles of teachers, schools, and caregivers in maintaining access to inclusive education).

## Methodological Framework and Design

The needs assessment applied a utilization-focused, non-experimental mixed-methods approach designed to generate evidence that is directly usable for programme decision-making. This framework prioritises timely, actionable, and contextually grounded findings, supported through systematic triangulation across multiple data sources. The mixed-methods approach combined analysis of existing secondary sources with primary data collection, as summarised in Table 1.

The methodological design included quantitative components, a child survey and a school-level needs assessment survey, to capture key indicators related to education access, learning continuity, and school functionality. These were complemented by qualitative methods, including KIIs with education stakeholders and specialised service providers and FGDs with parents/caregivers and teachers, to contextualise patterns and explore experiences, perceptions, and protection-related concerns shaping education needs. Findings are intended to inform protection-sensitive Education in Emergencies (EiE) programming by identifying priority risks within education delivery and guiding the integration of mitigation measures to strengthen safe access, protective learning environments, and referral readiness in schools. Implementation followed a collaborative model, whereby WV undertook the primary data collection, while SpivDiia supported the assessment across key phases, including inception and tool development, contributing to contextual sensitivity, local access, and shared ownership of findings.

Table 1 - Methodological Approach of the Needs Assessment

| Method                                   | Modality                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Secondary Data Collection                |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Secondary Data Analysis</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoES Reports</li> <li>• Education Cluster Reports</li> <li>• International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) Reports</li> <li>• INEE Reports</li> </ul> |
| Primary Data Collection                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Quantitative Data Collection</b>      |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Children Surveys / Questionnaires</b> | In-person Children Surveys where security permitted;<br>Online Children Surveys in areas with limited access.                                                                                       |
| <b>School Needs Assessment Surveys</b>   | Online Self-administered questionnaire.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Qualitative Data Collection</b>       |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>FGDs with Parents</b>                 | Online FGDs                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>FGDs with Teachers</b>                | In-person FGDs where security permitted; online FGDs in areas with limited acc                                                                                                                      |
| <b>KIIs</b>                              | Online KIIs with system representatives                                                                                                                                                             |



## Sampling Frame

This assessment concentrated on five target oblasts, **Dnipropetrovska, Chernihivska, Mykolaivska, Kharkivska, and Zaporizka**, identified as priority areas through the desk review and alignment with Education Sector and MoES coordination, and the operational response strategies of WV and SpivDiia. These oblasts were consistently highlighted as highly affected and presenting significant education needs and were therefore selected as the geographic focus for primary data collection.

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and discussions to capture both the scale and the drivers of education needs, in alignment with the INEE Minimum Standards and relevant Sphere standards for education. For the quantitative component, 19 schools were selected across the five target oblasts for an in-depth school needs assessment, conducted with school directors or acting directors. Schools were identified through a combination of (i) WV and SpivDiia's operational presence and contextual understanding of priority needs, and (ii) inputs from sector coordination mechanisms, partner agencies, and relevant local authorities to ensure coverage of the most affected locations.

For the children's survey, a school-based, non-probability sampling approach was applied, targeting approximately 20-30 children per school. Children were selected based on availability, willingness to participate, and parental consent, while aiming for diversity by age and gender. In total, 558 children's surveys were completed against a target of 480, with a very low non-response rate (1.41%).

For the qualitative component, 12 FGDs were conducted with teachers and parents using a purposive and convenience sampling approach, focusing on participants directly engaged with the assessed schools. In addition, 4 KIIs were conducted with stakeholders selected purposively based on their institutional roles within the education and CP sectors. As shown in Table 2, data collection reached 19 school surveys, 558 children's surveys, 12 FGDs, and 4 KIIs across the five target oblasts.

**Table 2 - Sample breakdown per oblast and tool**

| Name of Oblast  | School assessments | Children's survey | KIIs     | FGDs      |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------|
| Chernihivska    | 4                  | 117               | N/A      | 2         |
| Dnipropetrovska | 7                  | 203               |          | 4         |
| Kharkivska      | 3                  | 85                |          | 2         |
| Mykolaivska     | 3                  | 87                |          | 2         |
| Zaporizka       | 2                  | 66                |          | 2         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>19</b>          | <b>558</b>        | <b>4</b> | <b>12</b> |

Source: Primary Data Collection, October-November 2025, Ukraine.

## Demographic Profile of the FGD and KII participants

Out of the 12 FGDs that have been conducted, 6 FGDs were with 75 teachers (10 males and 65 females) and 6 FGDs with 72 parents/caregivers (14 males and 58 females). A detailed breakdown of FGD participants by group and gender is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 - Gender distribution per FGDs**

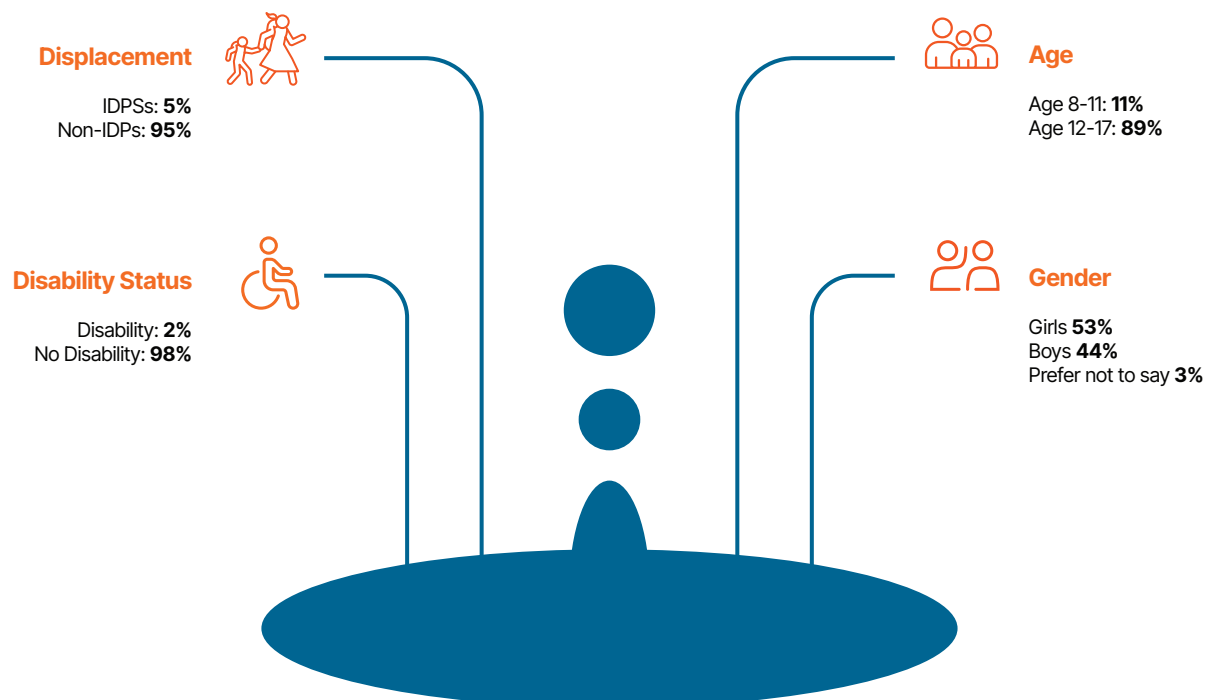
| Type of FGD              | Number of FGDs | Males       | Females     | Total Participants |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| With teachers            | 6              | 10<br>(13%) | 65<br>(87%) | 75                 |
| With parent / caregivers | 6              | 14<br>(19%) | 58<br>(81%) | 72                 |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>12</b>      | <b>24</b>   | <b>24</b>   | <b>24</b>          |

Source: 12 FGDs of teachers and parents, October 2025

A total of 4 KIIs were conducted with representatives from the Education Cluster, CP SubCluster, MHPSS Technical Working Group, and the MoES, providing system-level and coordination-focused insights.

## Demographic Profile of Children Surveys

**Figure 1 - Sample Demographics**



A total of 558 children participated in the survey across five oblasts, with responses concentrated in Dnipropetrovska (36%) and Chernihivska (21%). The sample primarily reflects adolescents, with 89% aged 12-17 and 11% aged 8-11, aligning with the assessment's analytical focus on older children. Gender representation was relatively balanced (53% girls, 44% boys, and 3% preferred not to say). A small share of respondents identified as internally displaced persons (IDPs) (5%), and 2% self-reported a disability. Table 4 presents the detailed demographic breakdown by oblast. Given this very small subgroup size (11 out of 558 respondents), disability status could not be used as a grouping variable for inferential analysis, and no statistically meaningful comparisons were conducted. Disability-related findings are therefore presented descriptively and triangulated with secondary data and qualitative insights from FGDs and KIIs.

**Table 4 - Breakdown of child sample per oblasts and demographic characteristics**

| Oblasts                | Proportion of responses | Age 8-11 | Age 12-17 | Boys | Girls | IDPs | Children with Disability |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|------|-------|------|--------------------------|
| <b>Chernihivska</b>    | 21%                     | 0%       | 100%      | 38%  | 62%   | 1%   | 1%                       |
| <b>Dnipropetrovska</b> | 36%                     | 15%      | 85%       | 42%  | 58%   | 7%   | 1%                       |
| <b>Kharkivska</b>      | 15%                     | 18%      | 82%       | 52%  | 48%   | 1%   | 4%                       |
| <b>Mykolaivska</b>     | 16%                     | 7%       | 93%       | 54%  | 46%   | 8%   | 5%                       |
| <b>Zaporizka</b>       | 12%                     | 14%      | 86%       | 41%  | 59%   | 9%   | 0%                       |

Source: Children survey, October 2025

Children were sampled from schools within each oblast in proportions reflecting each school's contribution to the overall child sample. In Dnipropetrovska, children were drawn from seven schools, with individual schools contributing between 11% and 17% of the oblast sample. The comparatively higher number of surveyed children in Dnipropetrovska reflects the oblast's large geographic coverage, inclusion of major urban centres (including Kryvyi Rih), and high concentration of internally displaced populations, which justified a proportionally larger sample. In Chernihivska, four schools contributed relatively evenly, each accounting for approximately 20%-29% of participating children. In Mykolaivska and Kharkivska, the sample was distributed across three schools per oblast, with each school representing roughly one third of participating children (31%-36% and 32%-36%, respectively). In Zaporizka, children were sampled from two schools, with Petropol Lyceum accounting for 53% of the oblast sample and Zaporizhia Collegium "Small Humanitarian Academy" contributing the remaining 47%. A detailed breakdown of the child sample by oblast, and school is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 - Breakdown of the child sampled per School and Oblasts

| Oblast          | School                   | % of Children Sampled |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Dnipropetrovska | Dnipropetrovska School 1 | 14%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 2 | 11%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 3 | 14%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 4 | 14%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 5 | 16%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 6 | 17%                   |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 7 | 14%                   |
|                 | <b>Subtotal</b>          | <b>100%</b>           |
| Chernihivska    | Chernihivska School 1    | 20%                   |
|                 | Chernihivska School 2    | 27%                   |
|                 | Chernihivska School 3    | 29%                   |
|                 | Chernihivska School 4    | 25%                   |
|                 | <b>Subtotal</b>          | <b>100%</b>           |
| Mykolaivska     | Mykolaivska School 1     | 33%                   |
|                 | Mykolaivska School 2     | 36%                   |
|                 | Mykolaivska School 3     | 31%                   |
|                 | <b>Subtotal</b>          | <b>100%</b>           |
| Kharkivska      | Kharkivska School 1      | 32%                   |
|                 | Kharkivska School 2      | 32%                   |
|                 | Kharkivska School 3      | 36%                   |
|                 | <b>Subtotal</b>          | <b>100%</b>           |
| Zaporizka       | Zaporizka School 1       | 53%                   |
|                 | Zaporizka School 2       | 47%                   |
|                 | <b>Subtotal</b>          | <b>100%</b>           |

Source: School Level Needs Assessment, October 2025



## Data Analysis Methodology

Prior to commencing data analysis, a structured analytical framework was developed to guide the systematic interpretation of findings and ensure coherence across data sources. The framework mapped all quantitative and qualitative instruments against the assessment's core thematic areas, enabling consistent alignment between research questions, data collection tools, and analytical outputs.

Findings were triangulated across primary data, secondary sources, and relevant cluster information to strengthen analytical rigour, comparability, and robustness.

Quantitative data were cleaned and analysed using SPSS, applying a combination of data cleaning procedures, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistical tests of association to examine patterns of education access, learning conditions, protection risks, and psychosocial needs across the sampled population. Descriptive analysis included frequencies, proportions, and cross-tabulations, with results disaggregated by age group, gender, displacement status, disability status, and geographic location. Inferential analysis was conducted at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, using values to assess the statistical significance of observed associations. However, given the non-probability sampling approach, quantitative findings are presented as indicative trends within the sample rather than population-level estimates and are primarily used to support analytical triangulation and interpretation.

Qualitative data from FGDs and KIs were transcribed and analysed, following a systematic thematic coding framework. Analysis focused on identifying recurring needs, perceived barriers, coping strategies, and system-level constraints affecting children's access to education and psychosocial support (PSS). Coding was organised around the assessment's analytical domains, including access and continuity of learning, school safety and preparedness, teacher well-being, CP concerns, and availability of mental health and PSS services. Attention was paid to differences across stakeholder groups (children, parents/caregivers, teachers, and system-level actors), as well as variations across geographic contexts.

Quantitative and qualitative findings were systematically triangulated to strengthen the credibility of results and to contextualise numerical trends with lived experiences and institutional perspectives. Secondary data sources, including relevant education cluster strategies, humanitarian guidelines, and national policy frameworks were reviewed in parallel to situate primary findings within the broader EiE context and to support interpretation.

Quality assurance processes were embedded throughout the analysis, including consistency checks on quantitative datasets, iterative review of qualitative coding, and internal validation workshops among the assessment team. This approach ensured that findings are methodologically sound, transparent, and fit for purpose, providing a robust evidence base to inform needs-based prioritisation and decision-making for EiE programming.

## Ethical Considerations

Child safeguarding and protection mainstreaming were systematically integrated across all stages of the assessment, in accordance with WV policies and standards. Participation was based on informed consent, with written permission obtained from parents and caregivers and assent secured from all children involved. Data collection tools were tailored to be age-appropriate and trauma-sensitive, and all respondents were informed of their right to participate voluntarily and withdraw at any time. Enumerators received guidance on ethical engagement, Do No Harm principles, and safeguarding obligations, including the application of established referral pathways. Mechanisms were in place through WV and partner systems to respond to any protection concerns identified during the assessment. All collected data were anonymised, securely stored, and managed in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and WV data protection requirements. No serious safeguarding issues were reported throughout the data collection period.

## Data Collection Process

The assessment was overseen by WV Ukraine Crisis Response (UCR), which led coordination and provided technical guidance to ensure methodological robustness, safeguarding compliance, and alignment with WV's standards. Implementation was carried out in partnership with SpivDiia, whose local presence enabled access to communities and enhanced contextual understanding across the five assessed oblasts.

Enumerators engaged in data collection had prior experience in field research, including work with children, and had completed all required trainings. They were fully familiar with WV policies and training materials, including the Code of Conduct, Safeguarding, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Data Protection, Acceptable Use of Technology, Conflict of Interest, and Personal Security (Light360)<sup>1</sup>. Prior to the start of data collection, enumerators also received targeted briefings and independently pilot tested the tools to ensure a clear understanding of question sequencing, terminology, and digital data entry processes.

Data collection was adapted to security conditions and access constraints. Where feasible, in-person school visits were conducted, notably in Mykolaivska and Dnipropetrovska oblasts. In areas with restricted access or elevated security risks, remote and online modalities were used to ensure continuity of data collection while prioritising the safety of participants and field teams.

Online surveys administered to children were conducted between 17 and 25 October, alongside online school-level checklists that were completed by school principals or other designated school representatives between 16 and 29 October. FGDs with parents/caregivers were carried out online, between 17 and 24 October, primarily due to work parent's work schedules and access limitations, while FGDs with teachers were held in person where security permitted and online where access was constrained. In parallel, online KIs were undertaken between 23 October and 5 November to accommodate the availability of national- and coordination-level stakeholders including representatives from education, CP, and mental health and PSS coordination mechanisms.

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<sup>1</sup> Light360 refers to a wearable personal safety light system providing 360-degree visibility, designed to enhance individual safety in field and emergency settings.

Protection mainstreaming and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) principles, safety, dignity, inclusion, participation, and do-no-harm, were applied as cross-cutting analytical lenses throughout the needs assessment, guiding both data collection and analysis. These principles informed not only how data were gathered and interpreted, but also how participants were engaged and risks were mitigated, including the adaptation of data collection tools for children and caregivers, the establishment of safe referral mechanisms for protection concerns, and the systematic incorporation of participant feedback on barriers to safe and equitable access to education.

## Limitations

This section outlines key methodological limitations that may affect the interpretation of the assessment findings. While mitigation measures were applied where feasible, the following considerations should be taken into account:

- **Sampling** Scope and representativeness: The assessment employed a non-probability, school-based sampling approach. While this enabled data collection in a highly constrained and conflict-affected environment, it limited the statistical representativeness of findings beyond the assessed schools and communities. Results therefore reflected indicative patterns and needs within the sampled locations rather than population-level estimates.
- **Data collection modalities and access constraints:** Security and access limitations necessitated the use of mixed data collection modalities, combining face-to-face and remote approaches. Differences in modality may have influenced participation dynamics, respondent engagement, and the depth of qualitative discussion across locations and stakeholder groups.
- **Response bias in self-reported data:** The assessment relied on self-reported data from children, parents/caregivers, teachers, and school representatives, including online surveys and facilitated FGDs. As a result, responses may have been influenced by recall bias, social desirability, or concerns related to safety and confidentiality, particularly when discussing sensitive topics.
- **Participant composition in FGDs:** In two parent FGDs, some participants were also teachers at the same schools. This overlap may have affected the openness of discussion and limited the diversity of perspectives shared, particularly regarding school-level challenges and accountability issues.
- **Tool applicability in the Ukrainian wartime context:** Certain questions within the school-level checklist were not fully aligned with the wartime education context in Ukraine (e.g. items related to early marriage or mandatory examinations). This led to frequent clarification requests from respondents and, in some cases, negative perceptions of the tool. This may have affected the consistency and reliability of responses for the affected questions, limiting the analytical value of these indicators and requiring cautious interpretation of related findings.

To mitigate these limitations, standardised data collection tools were used consistently across all modalities, and enumerators were trained to adapt facilitation approaches to different contexts and access conditions. In addition, findings were systematically triangulated across quantitative and qualitative data sources, as well as with secondary information, to strengthen the credibility of results and support balanced interpretation.

# FINDINGS

Findings are structured across four interconnected analytical layers, moving from the broader education crisis context to geographic variation, thematic barriers, and safety related risks affecting access to schooling:

1. Overall crisis context and implications for education
2. Geographic context of assessed areas
3. Barriers to learning continuity and quality
4. Safe access to schooling and protection risks in and around schools

The section first situates education challenges within the wider crisis context, followed by a geographic overview of the assessed oblasts to ground subsequent analysis in place specific realities.

The core findings are then presented under Barriers to learning continuity and quality (Section 3), organised into three thematic sub-sections: participation and learning progression barriers (Section 3.1), learner vulnerability, inclusion, and protection-related barriers (Section 3.2), and education workforce and caregiver constraints (Section 3.3). Each sub-section opens with a brief synthesis of key findings and presents integrated, triangulated evidence from quantitative surveys, qualitative FGDs and KIs, and relevant secondary sources.

Section 4 further deepens the analysis by examining safety and protection risks in and around schools, including safety on the way to school and within school environments, recognising safety as a cross-cutting determinant of access, participation, and learning quality.

Each main findings sub-section (Sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and Section 4) concludes with a focused take-away box, summarising the principal challenges and linking them directly to evidence-informed recommendations tailored to the barriers identified.

Throughout the findings, the term “oblast” is used to refer to administrative regions (governorates) in Ukraine and is applied consistently to reflect geographic variation in risks, barriers, and needs.



# 1. OVERALL CRISIS CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

## 1.1 Overall humanitarian crisis context

As Ukraine enters the fourth year following the escalation of the war in February 2022, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in both scale and complexity. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2025) sustained hostilities, large-scale displacement, and extensive damage to civilian infrastructure persist nationwide. Front-line areas remain exposed to near-continuous shelling, while repeated attacks on energy infrastructure have caused widespread disruptions to electricity and other essential services. In education-in emergencies contexts, these conditions directly affect whether in-person schooling is feasible, often forcing temporary or prolonged shifts to remote or blended learning modalities when school premises are damaged, unsafe, or without power. In 2025, humanitarian needs are expected to affect approximately 12.7 million people, around one third of the population, with the most critical needs concentrated in eastern, southern, and northern oblasts<sup>2</sup>.

Displacement remains a defining feature of the crisis. According to the International Organization for Migration's Ukraine Internal Displacement Report (2025), more than 5.7 million Ukrainians have sought refuge abroad, including over 5 million within the European Union (EU), while more than 3.7 million people remain internally displaced and an estimated 4.1 million have returned to frequently damaged areas of origin<sup>3</sup>. For the education sector, large-scale displacement means that children are often no longer attending their original schools, experience interruptions during school transfers, or must adapt to new learning environments and modalities, affecting continuity, concentration, and learning progression. Since February 2022, the war has significantly altered Ukraine's demographic and social landscape, marked by prolonged displacement and increased disability-related needs among vulnerable populations. Women, children, older people, and persons with disabilities are among the most affected groups, often facing sustained caregiving burdens and reduced household resilience. Displacement frequently involves families with children, including single-parent households, creating prolonged pressures on access to essential services, including education and protection<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, millions of people who remain in their homes continue to face significant hardship due to widespread infrastructure damage and disrupted access to basic services, particularly in front-line areas and in frontline and border areas exposed to cross-border hostilities, (OCHA, 2025). In such contexts, damaged or unsafe school facilities, unreliable electricity, and restricted mobility limit the use of physical learning spaces and require education responses to adapt delivery modalities and prioritise safety and psychosocial support alongside instruction. In areas outside of Ukrainian government control (Non-Government Controlled Areas" (NGCA), anecdotal reporting indicates extremely severe humanitarian conditions affecting an estimated one million people<sup>5</sup>.

2 Addendum: Re-Prioritization of the Ukraine 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2025) [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

3 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

4 Updated damage assessment finds \$524 billion needed for recovery in Ukraine over next decade | United Nations Development Programme

5 Addendum: Re-Prioritization of the Ukraine 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2025) [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

## 1.2 Impact of the crisis on education and learning environments

As per United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2024), damage to critical infrastructure across Ukraine remains extensive, with widespread destruction of energy, housing, transport, and basic service systems significantly exacerbating displacement related vulnerabilities and hindering recovery<sup>6</sup>. Disruptions to electricity, water, and transport have undermined the delivery of essential services nationwide, while large-scale damage to educational infrastructure, including thousands of damaged or destroyed schools, has severely constrained access to safe, continuous, and in-person education, particularly in conflict-affected areas<sup>7</sup>. These disruptions translate into reduced attendance and increased reliance on remote or hybrid learning modalities, particularly in areas where insecurity and infrastructure damage make daily travel to school unpredictable or unsafe.

Further to the widespread destruction of infrastructure across Ukraine, the education sector has emerged as one of the most severely affected service areas. Damage to school buildings, disruptions to energy and transport systems, and ongoing insecurity have collectively undermined the availability, safety, and continuity of education for children and teachers. In emergency contexts, frequent air raid alerts and persistent insecurity directly affect how schooling is delivered; parents often decide not to send their children to school due to safety concerns, resulting in irregular attendance or temporary non-attendance, while lessons that do take place are shortened, interrupted, or suspended as children move to shelters, often for prolonged and unpredictable periods, reducing effective instructional time and fragmenting learning.

At the national level, the MoES (2027) highlights interrelated challenges affecting the education and science sectors. Human capital has been weakened by casualties among education personnel, psychosocial distress (PSD), and the outmigration of experienced specialists, resulting in staff shortages, an ageing workforce, and a weak pipeline of young educators and researchers. These pressures affect not only staffing levels but also teachers' capacity to manage classrooms during repeated disruptions, support learners' emotional needs, and maintain consistent instruction under crisis conditions, increasing the need to help children cope with stress, fear, and repeated disruption while sustaining engagement in learning. These challenges are compounded by limited incentives for retention, low social prestige of teaching and scientific careers, and system-level constraints such as limited access to psychologists and inclusive education specialists, weak managerial capacity, fragmented data systems, and disrupted academic networks<sup>8</sup>.

Education and research infrastructure has also been severely affected, limiting safe face-to-face education and contributing to learning losses in many regions. Inadequate shelters in schools, insufficient digital equipment, and unreliable internet connectivity further constrain effective learning, while damage to scientific institutions and loss of data and collections threaten research continuity. Curricula remain partially outdated and insufficiently aligned with competency-based learning, inclusion, gender sensitivity, and labour market needs, while prolonged disruptions from the pandemic and war have resulted in learning losses, inadequate psychological support, and gaps in inclusive education, particularly for learners

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6 Updated damage assessment finds \$524 billion needed for recovery in Ukraine over next decade | United Nations Development Programme

7 Ibid.

8 The Strategic Action Plan of the MOES by 2027 | Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

with disabilities and mobile populations. Persistent financing constraints continue to undermine system performance, with insufficient funding, declining investment in research and innovation, inefficient use of public resources, and limited capacity to mobilise non-budgetary financing<sup>9</sup>.

Despite substantial needs, the education response has been constrained by the 2025 reprioritisation. According to UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children (2025)<sup>10</sup>, children in Ukraine are experiencing a fifth consecutive year of disrupted schooling, with cumulative learning setbacks estimated at around two years in reading and one year in mathematics. Ongoing insecurity continues to limit access to in-person learning — particularly in front-line areas — while repeated interruptions (including air raid alerts) and infrastructural constraints have contributed to continued reliance on remote and mixed delivery modalities, with approximately 700,000 children learning fully online and around one million in blended learning. UNICEF further notes that energy-related disruptions are expected to reduce learning time by several hours per day, with children dependent on online learning most affected.

An estimated 1.6 million people remain in need of education assistance nationwide; however, the Education Cluster is targeting approximately 0.4 million people, representing a 56% reduction compared to the original Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP). Correspondingly, education sector funding requirements have been reduced to US\$35.7 million, reflecting a 58% decrease from initial requirements<sup>11</sup>.

### 1.3 Why education is a priority

Education is a life-saving and protective intervention in humanitarian crises. Humanitarian assistance seeks to restore and sustain access to safe, inclusive, and quality education, enable out-of-school children to return to learning, enhance protection by minimising disruptions to education services, and strengthen system capacity to improve the effectiveness of EiE responses<sup>12</sup>.

Complementing this, the INEE Minimum Standards (2024) emphasise safe and equitable access to education, learner and teacher wellbeing, and the continuity and quality of learning in emergency and protracted crisis contexts. Grounded in principles of inclusion and non-discrimination, the standards highlight the importance of qualified and supported teachers, learner-centred approaches, and strong coordination and alignment with national education systems to ensure effective and sustainable education responses<sup>13</sup>.

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9 Ibid.

10 <https://www.unicef.org/media/166046/file/2025-HAC-Ukraine.pdf>

11 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

12 [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_assistance.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie_in_humanitarian_assistance.pdf)

13 INEE Minimum Standards for Education, 2024 Edition | INEE

## 2. GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF ASSESSED AREAS

Since February 2022, at least 363 kindergartens and schools have been destroyed and a further 2,246 damaged, significantly undermining education infrastructure across conflict-affected areas. More broadly, Ministry of Education and Science data reported by UNESCO<sup>14</sup> indicate that over 4,160 education institutions have been damaged or destroyed since the start of wide-scale hostilities. Based on the Ministry's reported baseline<sup>15</sup> of 31,347 preschool and school institutions, this suggests that approximately 13% of education facilities have been impacted through damage or destruction. Even where facilities remain structurally intact, many are unable to operate due to the absence or limited capacity of protective shelters.

In parallel, nearly 60% of assessed collective sites for displaced populations are located within educational facilities, further reducing their availability for educational use. These dynamics have placed sustained pressure on education systems and contributed to uneven access to safe and continuous schooling across affected regions<sup>16</sup>. Against this backdrop, the needs assessment focuses on Dnipropetrovska, Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, Zaporizka, and Chernihivska oblasts because they represent some of the highest education-related needs and disruption in Ukraine. These five oblasts were prioritised based on a combination of education infrastructure damage, of energy infrastructure damage and restrictions on access to the internet, safety constraints limiting school operation (including shelter availability and contamination risks), and sustained displacement pressures affecting access and service capacity.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Ukraine Internal Displacement Report (2025), the five assessed oblasts represent some of the most complex humanitarian and displacement contexts in Ukraine, due to their proximity to front-line areas, large internally displaced populations, and significant numbers of returnees. These factors place sustained pressure on local education systems, affecting both access to schooling and the capacity of services to respond to prolonged and evolving needs<sup>17</sup>. Education-specific safety risks further justify prioritisation. As outlined in the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy (2023-2025), all five oblasts are among the 11 regions where landmines and unexploded ordnance have been documented in or near schools and kindergartens, posing persistent risks to children, teachers, and education personnel<sup>18</sup>. Reflecting the severity of these conditions, rayons within the five assessed oblasts are frequently classified under sectoral severity phases 4 and 5, resulting in their prioritisation under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for life-saving education assistance<sup>19</sup>.

While all five oblasts face overlapping challenges, the intensity and drivers of education disruption vary by location. To capture these differences and inform more targeted education-in-emergencies responses, the analysis that follows provides oblast-level deep dives highlighting variations in access, safety, displacement pressures, and operational constraints affecting education outcomes.

14 <https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/damages-and-victims>

15 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-education-needs-assessment-survey-final-report-6-may-24june-2022-enuk>

16 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

17 Ibid.

18 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

19 Addendum: Re-Prioritization of the Ukraine 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2025) [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb



## Dnipropetrovsk

- Hosts the largest internally displaced population in Ukraine, with approximately 588,000 IDPs, accounting for 16% of the national total<sup>20</sup>.
- Accommodates an estimated 276,000 returnees, placing sustained pressure on education services, particularly for displaced children and adolescents<sup>21</sup>.
- Has recorded 180 educational establishments damaged or destroyed, contributing to significant disruption of education infrastructure<sup>22</sup>.
- Identified as one of the oblasts with the highest levels of recent (re-) displacement, accounting for 8% of reported movements nationwide<sup>23</sup>.



## Zaporizka

- Hosts approximately 208,000 IDPs, reflecting sustained displacement pressures on local services<sup>24</sup>.
- Has been affected by severe military operations, resulting in large-scale evacuation and displacement of children and education personnel; 8,697 children were displaced to other regions of Ukraine, and 6,993 children were evacuated abroad as of March 2023<sup>25</sup>.
- Continues to experience active hostilities, partial occupation, and recurrent displacement, contributing to prolonged instability and persistent barriers to education access<sup>26</sup>.
- Has sustained extensive damage to education infrastructure, with at least 196 educational institutions damaged or destroyed<sup>27</sup>.
- Demonstrates protracted displacement trends, as 77% of IDPs have been displaced for more than two years, indicating limited prospects for return due to ongoing hostilities<sup>28</sup>.

20 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

21 Ibid.

22 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

23 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

24 Ibid.

25 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

26 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

27 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

28 Ibid.



## Kharkivska

- Hosts the second largest internally displaced population, with approximately 463,000 IDPs, accounting for 12% of the national total<sup>29</sup>.
- Has a very high returnee population, estimated at 608,000 individuals, placing sustained pressure on public services, including education<sup>30</sup>.
- Continues to experience active hostilities, partial occupation, and recurrent displacement, resulting in persistent instability and access constraints<sup>31</sup>.
- Has sustained the most extensive damage to education infrastructure nationwide, with 623 educational institutions damaged or destroyed<sup>32</sup>.
- Has been heavily affected by severe military operations, leading to large-scale evacuation of education actors; 62,837 schoolchildren and 1,844 teachers were evacuated abroad<sup>33</sup>.
- Has recorded significant child casualties linked to hostilities, with 74 children killed and 226 injured since 24 February 2022<sup>34</sup>.
- Remains a primary centre of conflict-related displacement, with 27% of the most recent (re-)displacements<sup>35</sup>.



## Mykolaivska

- Remained under Ukrainian Government's control, while continued to be affected by the impacts of earlier frontline exposure<sup>36</sup>.
- Hosts approximately 131,000 IDPs, contributing to sustained pressure on education and other basic service<sup>37</sup>.
- Has a large returnee population, estimated at 265,000 individuals, reflecting ongoing population movements and reintegration needs<sup>38</sup>.
- Continues to face education system challenges linked to prior frontline exposure, infrastructure damage, and continued displacement and return dynamics<sup>39</sup>.
- Is among the most heavily affected oblasts by damage to educational infrastructure, significantly constraining the availability of safe and functional learning spaces<sup>40</sup>.

29 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb



## Chernihivska

- Hosts a comparatively smaller population, estimated at 65,000 IDPs, reflecting lower displacement volumes relative to other assessed oblasts<sup>41</sup>.
- Has a substantial returnee population, estimated at 193,000 individuals, indicating ongoing reintegration and service restoration needs<sup>42</sup>.
- Represents a security-sensitive border region, where displacement and return dynamics continue to place pressure on education and other essential services<sup>43</sup>.
- Faces specific administrative and security-related restrictions on education provision and population movement, particularly in frontline hromadas, due to severe security constraints and the high frequency of cross-border attacks along the northern and eastern borders<sup>44</sup>.



41 IOM\_UKR\_Internal Displacement Report\_GPS R20\_April 2025.pdf

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

## 3. BARRIERS TO LEARNING CONTINUITY AND QUALITY

This section analyses the main barriers affecting learning continuity and educational quality. It first examines participation and learning progression barriers, including attendance, modality disruptions, and progression risks. It then explores learner vulnerability, inclusion, and protection-related barriers, focusing on safety, psychosocial pressures, and protection risks. Finally, it assesses education workforce and caregiver constraints, highlighting how limitations faced by teachers and caregivers affect instructional quality and access to support.

### 3.1 Participation and learning progression barriers

#### Overall barriers to education

Educational participation across the assessed oblasts is constrained by a convergence of security, infrastructure, technological, psychosocial, and economic barriers that jointly undermine access to schooling and learning continuity. These barriers undermine not only access to education but also education's protective function, as irregular attendance and disrupted schooling increase children's exposure to isolation, psychosocial harm, and protection risks. Secondary sources highlight that ongoing insecurity, including shelling, proximity to frontlines and borders, and landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination near schools, continues to limit safe access to face-to-face education, particularly in frontline and rural areas<sup>45</sup>. These risks are consistently echoed in FGDs and KIs, where parents and education stakeholders described fear of attacks and safety concerns as key factors discouraging regular attendance, even where school facilities and shelters are formally available.

Disruptions to learning are further compounded by inadequate conditions during emergencies and repeated shifts between learning modalities. Primary qualitative data from FGDs describe extended periods spent in school shelters as highly disruptive, as shelters are often overcrowded and lack adequate space, furniture, internet connectivity, and age-appropriate separation. Secondary evidence similarly notes that extensive damage to school infrastructure continues to reduce safe and functional learning spaces, while reliance on remote learning has intensified technological and energy-related constraints<sup>46</sup>. Across FGDs and KIs, frequent power outages, unstable connectivity, and shortages of digital devices were reported to prevent consistent participation in online or blended learning, both at school and at home.

Household-level constraints further shape children's engagement in education. Primary qualitative findings highlight that displacement-related stress, fear of attacks, social isolation, and financial hardship discourage participation in both in-person and remote education. Key informants reinforced that limited household resources constrain access to essential learning materials and school supplies, particularly in frontline and displacement-affected areas. Secondary data indicate that these pressures disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, children with chronic illnesses, and those living in rural or displacement-affected households<sup>47</sup>.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

PSD emerges as a cross-cutting barrier affecting children's motivation, concentration, and sustained engagement in learning. FGDs with parents and KIs described how stress, sleep disruption, fear, and anxiety linked to ongoing insecurity reduce children's ability to focus and resume learning after interruptions. Primary qualitative data also point to age-related differences: younger children's participation is more directly shaped by parental safety concerns, while older children are more likely to disengage or opt for remote learning due to perceived flexibility and comfort. Key informants further noted that internally displaced children experience varied adaptation outcomes in new school environments, with some requiring additional time and support to catch up academically. Sustained access to education is shown to act as a protective factor by providing routine, social interaction, and psychosocial stability, all of which are weakened when learning is repeatedly disrupted.

**“The main challenge is shelling and air raid alerts. During an alert, children must stay in the shelter, and the duration is uncertain — it can last several hours. As a result, the educational process is temporarily suspended, and children are at risk, which is the primary difficulty at the moment” (FGD - Parents, Mykolaiv).**

Overall, triangulated evidence from secondary sources, FGDs, and KIs indicates that barriers to education in the assessed oblasts are not isolated but mutually reinforcing. Security-related risks, inadequate learning conditions during emergencies, technological and energy constraints, household-level pressures, and PSD interact to undermine sustained participation and learning continuity. Across all data sources, these barriers are shown to affect children's education not due to lack of motivation, but due to persistent structural, safety, and wellbeing constraints.



Table 6 - Ranked access barriers to attendance (highest to lowest impact)

| Access barrier                                                                             | Priority level  | Rationale (impact on attendance)                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Safety and security risks (shelling, air raids, proximity to frontlines, landmines)</b> | High priority   | Immediate life-threatening risks that directly prevent attendance and drive parental refusal to send children to school.    |
| Inadequate shelter availability and conditions during emergencies                          | High priority   | Prolonged shelter stays and unsafe conditions interrupt learning and reinforce safety concerns, even when schools are open. |
| Psychosocial distress linked to conflict exposure                                          | High priority   | Fear, anxiety, and stress significantly reduce children's ability to attend, concentrate, and reengage after disruptions.   |
| Damage to school infrastructure and unsafe learning environments                           | Medium priority | Limits safe, functional learning spaces and constrains in-person attendance.                                                |
| Disruptions due to repeated shifts between learning modalities                             | Medium priority | Undermines routine and continuity, contributing to irregular attendance and disengagement.                                  |
| <b>Technological and energy constraints (power outages, connectivity, lack of devices)</b> | Medium priority | Prevent consistent participation when learning shifts to remote or blended modalities.                                      |
| <b>Transportation and distance challenges</b>                                              | Lower priority  | Discourage attendance in unsafe or remote areas, particularly for younger children.                                         |
| <b>Displacement-related adaptation challenges</b>                                          | Lower priority  | Can delay regular attendance but vary by child and context.                                                                 |

Prioritisation (see Table 6) is based on the severity, immediacy, and direct impact on school attendance, in line with EiE and protection-mainstreaming principles. Safety related risks, shelter conditions, and psychosocial distress are classified as high priority because they directly influence parental decision-making and children's capacity to attend school. Medium-priority barriers reduce access through infrastructure damage, learning disruptions, and modality constraints, while lower-priority barriers primarily affect attendance indirectly and can be addressed once minimum safety and protection conditions are in place.

## Attendance and dropout patterns

Primary quantitative data indicate that most children remain enrolled in formal education; however, attendance regularity and dropout risks vary significantly by oblast and remain highly sensitive to security and contextual constraints. Among surveyed children, 90% of children were reported to be registered and attending school regularly, while approximately 5% attend alternative forms of education and just under 5% are registered but do not attend consistently. Attendance patterns did not differ significantly by gender, suggesting that attendance challenges cut across boys and girls rather than reflecting gender-based exclusion. This aligns with the INEE Minimum Standards (2024), which emphasise equitable access to education and the need to address structural and contextual barriers rather than individual characteristics when attendance is disrupted in emergency settings.

Disaggregation by oblast reveals marked geographic disparities in attendance patterns. Regular attendance was highest in Mykolaivska (99%) and Dnipropetrovska (96%) oblasts, indicating strong formal engagement despite ongoing disruptions. In contrast, lower shares of regular attendance were observed in Chernihivska (79%) and Kharkivska (80%) oblasts, where higher proportions of children attend irregularly or rely on alternative education modalities, reflecting greater fragility in sustained participation. These geographic disparities are consistent with secondary data from the 2023-2024 period, which indicated that attendance risks were particularly elevated in eastern oblasts (Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia oblasts), where insecurity and reliance on online or alternative learning modalities were more pronounced, and where non-attendance among rural households reached up to 34%<sup>48</sup>.

Dropout data from the school needs assessment further highlight marked regional differences, confirming that disengagement risks are unevenly distributed across the assessed oblasts. Mykolaivska records the highest dropout rate, at 10%, followed by Zaporizka at 9% and Dnipropetrovska at 7%. Kharkivska reports a lower but still notable dropout rate of 5%, while Chernihivska shows the lowest dropout rate at 2% (see Table 7). These figures suggest that even oblasts with relatively high attendance can experience substantial dropout, pointing to episodic or cumulative disruptions rather than immediate disengagement from education. School-level reporting on the reasons for dropout indicates that most cases are linked to mobility rather than permanent disengagement from education. The most frequently cited reasons include relocation to other regions within Ukraine or abroad, as well as transfer to another educational institution. In several instances, relocation and school transfer were reported simultaneously, suggesting that changes in enrolment are often associated with displacement or migration rather than a complete exit from the education system. This interpretation aligns with earlier secondary assessments (2023-2024), which highlighted that sustained exposure to security disruptions, shifts toward remote learning, and uneven access to enabling conditions contributed to cumulative dropout risks rather than abrupt withdrawal from schooling<sup>49</sup>.

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48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

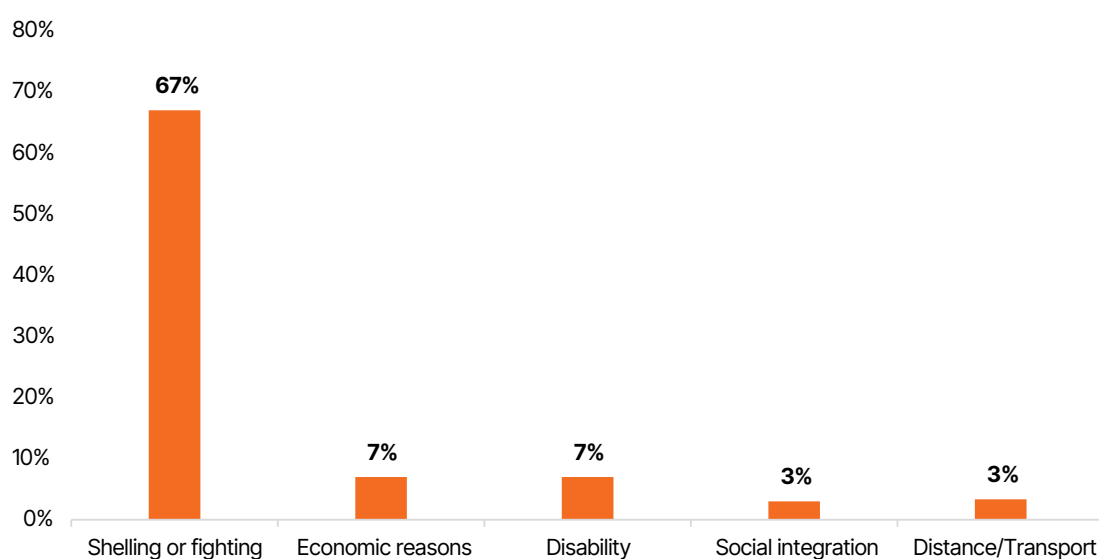
Table 7 - Schools Needs Assessment Results

| Oblasts         | Name of school           | Total Enrolled in academic year 2024 - 2025 | Total % of children attending remotely | Total % of children dropped out | TOTAL % of children with disabilities | TOTAL % of IDP children |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Chernihivska    | Chernihivska School 1    | 724                                         | 5%                                     | 2%                              | 2%                                    | 3%                      |
|                 | Chernihivska School 2    | 419                                         | 4%                                     | 3%                              | 2%                                    | 1%                      |
|                 | Chernihivska School 3    | 338                                         | 9%                                     | 0%                              | 2%                                    | 2%                      |
|                 | Chernihivska School 4    | 663                                         | 5%                                     | 3%                              | 2%                                    | 4%                      |
|                 | <b>Chernihivska</b>      | <b>2144</b>                                 | <b>5%</b>                              | <b>2%</b>                       | <b>2%</b>                             | <b>2%</b>               |
| Dnipropetrovska | Dnipropetrovska School 3 | 517                                         | 15%                                    | 11%                             | 1%                                    | 5%                      |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 4 | 775                                         | 11%                                    | 0%                              | 1%                                    | 6%                      |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 6 | 411                                         | 5%                                     | 13%                             | 2%                                    | 8%                      |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 7 | 558                                         | 5%                                     | 10%                             | 2%                                    | 10%                     |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 2 | 907                                         | 9%                                     | 0%                              | 1%                                    | 11%                     |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 1 | 913                                         | 13%                                    | 14%                             | 1%                                    | 9%                      |
|                 | Dnipropetrovska School 5 | 1180                                        | 5%                                     | 7%                              | 2%                                    | 6%                      |
|                 | <b>Dnipropetrovska</b>   | <b>5261</b>                                 | <b>9%</b>                              | <b>7%</b>                       | <b>1%</b>                             | <b>8%</b>               |
| Kharkivska      | Kharkivska School 3      | 256                                         | 5%                                     | 11%                             | 1%                                    | 7%                      |
|                 | Kharkivska School 1      | 470                                         | 12%                                    | 7%                              | 2%                                    | 7%                      |
|                 | Kharkivska School 2      | 536                                         | 100%                                   | 1%                              | 2%                                    | 6%                      |
|                 | <b>Kharkivska</b>        | <b>1262</b>                                 | <b>48%</b>                             | <b>5%</b>                       | <b>2%</b>                             | <b>6%</b>               |
| Mykolaivska     | Mykolaivska School 1     | 384                                         | 8%                                     | 9%                              | 3%                                    | 8%                      |
|                 | Mykolaivska School 2     | 582                                         | 22%                                    | 6%                              | 2%                                    | 16%                     |
|                 | Mykolaivska School 3     | 305                                         | 41%                                    | 17%                             | 3%                                    | 23%                     |
|                 | <b>Mykolaivska</b>       | <b>1271</b>                                 | <b>22%</b>                             | <b>10%</b>                      | <b>2%</b>                             | <b>15%</b>              |
| Zaporizka       | Zaporizka School 1       | 345                                         | 5%                                     | 17%                             | 5%                                    | 19%                     |
|                 | Zaporizka School 12      | 684                                         | 30%                                    | 5%                              | 5%                                    | 8%                      |
|                 | <b>Zaporizka</b>         | <b>1029</b>                                 | <b>15%</b>                             | <b>6%</b>                       | <b>2%</b>                             | <b>12%</b>              |

Source: School Level Needs Assessment, October 2025

Among children who reported not attending regularly or relying on alternative education arrangements, safety-related concerns clearly emerged as the dominant driver of disrupted participation. Two thirds (67%) cited school insecurity linked to shelling or fighting as the main reason for irregular attendance or non-attendance, far outweighing economic reasons (7%), disability- or health-related barriers (7%), distance and transport challenges (3%), or social integration issues (3%) (see Figure 2). This reinforces that attendance challenges are driven primarily by external security conditions rather than a lack of demand for education or parental prioritisation. Secondary evidence from the 2023-2024 period similarly documented security exposure, movement restrictions, and repeated interruptions to schooling as central drivers of irregular attendance, particularly in conflict-affected eastern regions<sup>50</sup>.

**Figure 2 - Safety Related Concerns**



50 Ibid.

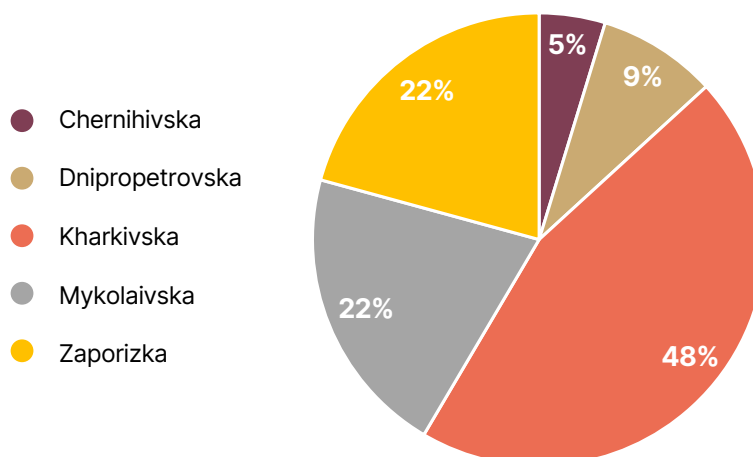
Qualitative findings from FGDs with teachers further contextualise these patterns and help explain the persistence of enrolment alongside fragile attendance. Teachers consistently reported few cases of permanent dropout, describing most absences as temporary and closely linked to air raid alerts, time spent in shelters, or broader security disruptions rather than deliberate disengagement from education. Attendance and participation were observed to improve when children were motivated and when schools were able to provide supportive measures within their limited capacity. Teachers highlighted the importance of remedial and catch-up classes in addressing learning gaps caused by interruptions, particularly in core subjects. Supportive measures such as hot meals, school transportation, PSS, consultations with teachers, and extracurricular activities were viewed as critical in sustaining engagement and preventing longer-term dropout, even as repeated disruptions continue to undermine learning continuity.

Taken together, triangulated findings indicate that while most children remain formally connected to education, attendance and learning continuity are fragile and uneven across oblasts. Primary quantitative data confirm significant regional disparities and identify security as the central driver of disrupted participation, while qualitative insights underline the role of school-based support mechanisms in mitigating disengagement. Embedded secondary evidence corroborates that these challenges reflect longer-term conflict related and structural dynamics affecting education delivery in Ukraine.

### Distance Learning Constraints

Primary quantitative data from the School Needs Assessment (2024-2025) indicate that distance learning remains a significant component of education delivery across the assessed oblasts, although its prevalence varies considerably by context. Reliance on remote learning is highest in Kharkivska oblast, where 48% of students are enrolled in distance learning, followed by Mykolaivska and Zaporizka oblasts, each at 22%. In Chernihivska oblast, 5% of students are engaged in remote learning. Dnipropetrovska oblast shows the lowest proportional reliance on distance education, with 9% of students enrolled remotely (see Figure 3). These findings underscore that a substantial share of children, particularly in conflict-affected and frontline contexts, continue to depend on remote modalities, highlighting the importance of ensuring the functionality and quality of distance learning to sustain equitable access to education. In line with the INEE Minimum Standards (2024), the quality and continuity of distance learning are therefore critical to ensuring equitable access to education where in-person schooling is unsafe or interrupted.

Figure 3 - Total percentage of children attending remotely during 2024-2025 academic year



Secondary data from the 2023-2024 period indicate that electricity outages and unreliable internet connectivity were among the most consistently reported constraints affecting distance learning in Ukraine. Zaporizka oblast faced particularly acute challenges, with 52% of respondents reporting that online classes were cancelled several times a week or more due to electricity and internet disruptions. In newly accessible areas of Kharkivska oblast, capacity for distance learning was severely compromised by the widespread pillage and destruction of educational infrastructure. In Chernihivska oblast, frequent shelling and repeated attacks on energy infrastructure increased reliance on generators and charging stations, particularly during winter months, in order to sustain access to online education. These disruptions regularly interrupted lessons and undermined learning continuity, even where children remained formally enrolled.

FGDs with parents further illustrate how infrastructural constraints translate into reduced learning quality and weakened engagement. Caregivers consistently reported that the number and duration of lessons generally remained unchanged across online and offline modalities; however, distance learning was widely described as less effective. Parents noted persistent difficulties in monitoring children's engagement during online classes, often being unsure whether children were actively studying. These challenges were compounded by frequent electricity outages and unstable internet or mobile connectivity, which regularly interrupted lessons and disrupted daily learning routines.

**“Teachers try to ensure that children learn within this mixed schedule, but it is difficult to monitor remotely whether a child is paying attention or distracted”**  
(FGD - Teachers, Chernihivska Oblast).

Age-specific challenges were also highlighted, affecting children's ability to benefit from distance learning. Caregivers reported that older students struggled with more complex subjects that parents found difficult to support, while younger children were more easily distracted, less disciplined, and less able to concentrate in home-based learning environments. Secondary data from earlier assessments indicated that device access further exacerbated distance learning challenges, particularly for younger children. Younger children were less likely to own laptops or smartphones and were more likely to share devices with other household members. In some cases, children relied on neighbours or friends to access devices for online learning, which increased security concerns and CP risks<sup>51</sup>.

Beyond academic impacts, parents reported social, behavioural, and physical consequences associated with prolonged reliance on distance learning. Limited interaction with peers was linked to increased social withdrawal, with some children forming stronger attachments to screens than to classmates. Reduced physical activity and prolonged screen time were also identified as concerns, particularly for younger children, contributing to fatigue and decreased motivation.

KIs reinforce and extend these findings, highlighting the cumulative impact of technical, psychosocial, and contextual factors on distance learning engagement. KIs noted reduced motivation, weaker study routines, and difficulties maintaining focus in online settings, with children often keeping cameras off and engaging minimally during lessons. Limited peer interaction was widely reported as contributing to disengagement and making transitions back to in-person learning more challenging. Respondents also emphasised the cumulative psychosocial strain resulting from prolonged crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic followed by war-related stress, which has left many children progressing through multiple grades without sustained exposure to in-person schooling.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Despite these constraints, qualitative findings highlight important mitigating factors that support children's continued participation in distance learning. Caregivers consistently described teachers as flexible, approachable, and responsive, noting their willingness to adapt teaching methods, provide additional explanations, and offer extra support outside scheduled lessons. The reduced need for commuting was also viewed positively, as it allowed children to connect to classes quickly from home and reduced safety and time related concerns associated with travel.

Regarding improvements, KIIs, particularly with the MoES, emphasised the need for adequate resources and continued capacity support to strengthen distance learning. Access to appropriate digital devices was highlighted as essential for both students and teachers across online, blended, and classroom settings. While teachers were described as having experience with remote teaching and access to professional development modules, respondents stressed that continuous learning remains necessary as teaching modalities evolve, particularly within blended learning environments. The provision of assistive and quality learning equipment, such as cameras and microphones, was identified as a key enabler for improving the effectiveness and inclusiveness of distance learning, especially for children studying from home.

### **Learning outcomes, exam results, and comprehensions**

Primary quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that children's learning outcomes and comprehension have been substantially affected across all assessed oblasts, despite high rates of formal grade progression. While most children remain enrolled and continue to advance through grades, evidence from surveys and interviews suggests that learning continuity and mastery of content have been significantly compromised.

Quantitative data from the children's survey show that formal progression remains high but masks underlying learning challenges. Overall, 97% of surveyed children reported that they moved to the next grade during the school year, with no statistically significant differences by gender, oblast, or displacement status. However, among the small

proportion who did not progress (n=19), the most frequently cited reasons were that online learning was too difficult (26%), some subjects were hard to understand (26%), and difficulties focusing or studying (21%). Safety concerns (5%), bullying or violence (11%), and low grades (16%) were also reported, though less frequently. Earlier assessments similarly found that learning progression often continued during the war period even as learning consistency declined, with only around 40% of parents reporting that their children were able to learn consistently during earlier phases of the conflict<sup>52</sup>.

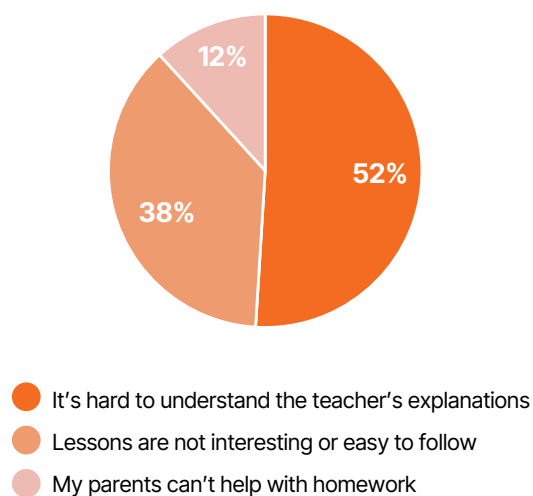
Widespread difficulties in understanding lessons further illustrate the depth of learning challenges. 57% of surveyed children reported that some lessons were hard to understand, and an additional 6% reported that most lessons were very difficult. Only 28% indicated that they understood their lessons well (see Figure 5). The main reasons cited for poor comprehension were difficulty understanding teachers' explanations (52%) and lessons being uninteresting or hard to follow (38%), followed by limited parental support with homework (12%) (see Figure 4). These patterns point to instructional and engagement challenges rather than isolated individual learning difficulties. Secondary data from the post-COVID and early war period likewise pointed to reduced instructional quality and interaction, particularly under distance and blended learning modalities, as key drivers of declining comprehension, especially among younger

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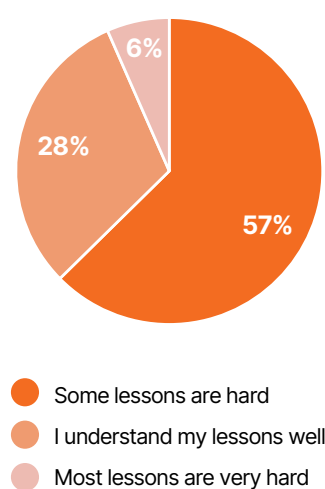
52 Ibid.

learners<sup>53</sup>. Qualitative findings help explain how these learning challenges have accumulated over time. KIs highlighted that prolonged exposure to COVID-19 disruptions followed by war-related interruptions created an environment not conducive to sustained learning. Some children were reported to have progressed through multiple grades without experiencing regular in-person schooling, contributing to weakened foundational skills and cumulative learning gaps. This pattern was also documented in earlier reviews, which noted that repeated modality shifts and prolonged reliance on distance learning disrupted the development of core competencies, particularly during key transition stages such as the move from primary to secondary education<sup>54</sup>.

**Figure 4 -  
Reasons of poor comprehension**



**Figure 5 -  
Lessons Understanding among children**



Disaggregated analysis reveals differential learning experiences, though the underlying barriers remain consistent. Gender-disaggregated data show a statistically significant difference in reported comprehension levels: boys (33%) were more likely than girls (24%) to report understanding their lessons well, while girls more frequently reported that some or most lessons were difficult. However, the reasons for difficulty were similar across genders and centred on clarity of explanations, lesson engagement, and limited support at home. Differences by oblast further reflect how learning conditions shape outcomes. Zaporizka oblast showed a relatively higher share of children reporting good understanding of lessons (42%), while Kharkivska and Dnipropetrovska had higher proportions reporting difficulties. Across all oblasts, difficulty understanding teachers' explanations remained the most commonly cited challenge. Secondary evidence from conflict-affected regions during 2023-2024 likewise reported that areas experiencing more frequent disruptions and heavier reliance on remote learning faced greater challenges in maintaining instructional quality and learning continuity<sup>55</sup>.

Analysis by displacement status shows that displacement compounds learning challenges without fundamentally altering their nature. Internally displaced children reported slightly higher levels of difficulty understanding lessons (69%) compared to nondisplaced children (65%), though these differences were not statistically significant. Across both groups, challenges related to comprehension and engagement predominated. Earlier assessments similarly observed that displacement intensified existing barriers, such as unstable learning environments and reduced support, rather than creating entirely new learning constraints<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

## Learning material availability and gaps

Access to learning materials across the assessed oblasts is uneven and shaped primarily by household capacity rather than systematic school-based provision. Across data sources, the most critical gaps relate to digital devices needed for online and blended learning, as well as specialised and adapted materials required for inclusive education and for practical subjects such as mathematics, chemistry, and physics, including assistive learning tools, adapted textbooks, and practical laboratory equipment. Secondary evidence indicates that shortages of laptops and tablets continue to constrain children's participation in formal online education nationwide, with these gaps particularly acute in rural areas and among vulnerable households<sup>57</sup>. FGDs with parents and KIIs with teachers reinforce that these shortages translate directly into interrupted learning, reduced engagement, and limited opportunities for practical or interactive instruction.

Children's self-reported access to learning materials masks important underlying constraints. Survey data from children show that almost all respondents (99%) reported having the materials they need for school, such as books, pens, bags, or uniforms. However, a notable proportion still reported shortages related to insufficient books, chairs, or internet connectivity (13%), indicating that material adequacy is not uniform. Importantly, survey findings also reveal that learning materials are overwhelmingly procured by families rather than schools, with 97% of children reporting that materials are provided by parents. FGDs with parents confirm this pattern, highlighting that households frequently purchase basic supplies, textbooks, and digital equipment because schools are unable to provide them consistently. This reliance on household provision raises concerns about equity, as access to education becomes closely tied to families' financial resources.

Digital and technical learning equipment represents a persistent gap affecting both distance and classroom-based learning. Secondary data estimate that significant numbers of electronic devices are still required to enable effective online education<sup>58</sup>, while parents in FGDs described how limited access to devices and unreliable internet connectivity prevent regular participation in lessons at home. Device sharing within households was also reported, increasing learning disruptions and, in some cases, protection risks. These constraints were described as particularly limiting during periods of remote or blended learning, when digital access is essential for continuity.

Subject-specific learning materials and opportunities for practical learning are insufficient. FGDs with parents consistently highlighted the absence of specialised equipment for science subjects, particularly chemistry and physics, noting that the lack of reagents and practical tools prevents hands-on experiments and experiential learning. Teachers interviewed through FGDs and KIIs echoed these concerns, reporting that shortages of interactive and didactic materials limit their ability to deliver engaging, practice-oriented lessons and contribute to a more theoretical, less effective learning experience.

Inclusive education is further constrained by the lack of specialised and adapted learning materials. Secondary sources indicate that children with disabilities face compounded barriers due to shortages of assistive devices and adapted materials, including tactile, visual, and accessible formats<sup>59</sup>. Teachers' perspectives reinforce that standard textbooks and curricula are often insufficient to address diverse learning needs, and that the absence of specialised materials, combined with shortages of trained support staff, limits the effective implementation of inclusive and differentiated instruction. Survey data further support this gap, with a proportion of children with disabilities reporting that they lack the specialised tools or equipment that would support their learning.

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57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

Material gaps are closely linked to broader infrastructure and learning environment constraints. Across FGDs and KIs, parents and teachers referred to classroom conditions, specialised rooms, libraries, and shelters as factors that affect how learning materials can be used in practice. These infrastructure-related issues influence both safety and learning quality and are therefore examined in detail in Section 4 of the findings.

Overall, triangulated evidence indicates that learning material gaps, particularly digital devices and specialised, adapted resources, remain a significant barrier to effective education delivery. While most children report having basic school materials, the overwhelming reliance on households to procure these items confirms that access to learning is strongly shaped by families' ability to purchase equipment. Across all data sources, this dynamic is shown to disproportionately affect children from vulnerable households and children with disabilities, reinforcing existing inequalities in access, participation, and learning outcomes.

### **Catch-up availability, demand, and acceptability**

Across all data sources, the demand for catch-up and remedial support is consistently high. Quantitative survey data show that 51% of children would like to join a special afterschool programme offering engaging activities and free school supplies, while a further 29% are unsure and only 17% report no interest. The absence of significant differences by age or gender suggests that catch-up support is broadly acceptable across demographic groups. Qualitative findings from FGDs with parents reinforce this demand, with caregivers unanimously emphasising the need for additional support to address accumulated learning gaps caused by prolonged disruptions and repeated modality shifts. Teachers similarly confirmed that catch-up classes remain necessary across all assessed oblasts, particularly for students affected by conflict-related interruptions to learning. Secondary data support these findings, indicating that prolonged reliance on disrupted or distance learning modalities has reduced children's ability to learn independently, limiting the effectiveness of self-study approaches commonly used to address learning gaps<sup>60</sup>.

Safety emerged as a decisive factor shaping both the availability of and participation in catch-up support. KIs consistently identified children's physical and psychological safety as a non-negotiable condition for attendance, emphasising that participation should only be encouraged where adequate protection measures are in place. Secondary data illustrate how security risks directly constrain participation. In Kharkivska oblast, persistent missile strikes and landmine contamination discourage parents from allowing children to attend additional face-to-face consultations, even when catch-up services are available. As a result, earlier assessments reported that 16% of learners in urban areas and 11% in rural areas received no catch-up support at all.<sup>61</sup> KIs further highlighted that strengthening school shelters, through repairs, upgrades, or construction where absent, is a key enabling condition for expanding in-person catch-up support, particularly in frontline regions.

While demand for catch-up support is high, participation is strongly influenced by children's motivation and the perceived quality of programmes. FGDs with parents emphasised that engaging and motivating teachers are central to attracting children, particularly those who have had negative experiences with certain teachers. The option of having alternative teachers for catch-up classes was viewed as a way to rebuild interest and willingness to attend. Parents also stressed that interactive and enjoyable sessions are more appealing than purely academic formats. Strong support was expressed for developmental, sports, and outdoor activities,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

which help children release energy, support social adaptation, and reduce academic pressure while still contributing to learning recovery. Teachers corroborated these perspectives, noting that interactive and engaging approaches increase participation, whereas purely remedial or academic formats are less effective, particularly for younger or disengaged students.

FGDs with teachers highlighted that catch-up needs span a wide range of subjects, with the strongest demand reported for mathematics, Ukrainian language, English, physics, algebra, geometry, chemistry, biology, computer science, and subjects linked to national examinations (Multidisciplinary National Test, MNT). Teachers stressed that catch-up support is particularly critical for students preparing for exams, especially those unable to afford private tutoring. Teachers also emphasised the importance of creative and practical disciplines, including music, choreography, drawing, sculpture, and theatre, as part of catch-up provision, noting their role in supporting holistic development, engagement, and emotional regulation alongside academic recovery.

Despite generally positive perceptions of catch-up classes, participation remains uneven. Teachers reported that catch-up sessions tend to be attended repeatedly by the same group of students, while children most in need of support often do not participate. Low student motivation and limited parental supervision were repeatedly cited as barriers. KIs highlighted the absence of systematic tracking and follow-up mechanisms as a key gap. Respondents emphasised the need to identify children at risk of disengagement earlier and to re-establish contact before formal withdrawal from schooling, enabling more timely and targeted catch-up interventions.

KIs and FGDs consistently pointed to age-related differences in motivation and engagement. Older students, particularly those in examination years, were described as more motivated due to future pathways and certification requirements, making catch-up classes especially valuable. In contrast, younger students were reported to be less motivated and in greater need of approaches that integrate PSS with academic content. Catch-up provision was also seen as particularly important for children who have studied remotely or in blended formats for extended periods, as these students often face deeper learning gaps. In relatively safe areas, KIs noted that schools have some curricular flexibility, including unallocated teaching hours, which could be leveraged for small-group or targeted catch-up support.

Triangulated evidence across surveys, FGDs, KIs, and secondary sources indicates that catch-up support is widely needed, broadly acceptable, and viewed as essential for addressing cumulative learning gaps. Quantitative data confirm strong demand, qualitative findings explain how safety, motivation, and programme design shape participation, and secondary data highlight the structural and security-related constraints that limit reach. Effective catch-up provision therefore depends not only on availability, but on ensuring safe environments, engaging delivery models, age-appropriate approaches, and targeted outreach to children most at risk of disengagement.

### **Key Take-away**

Given the identified barriers to attendance, distance learning, and learning continuity, the findings point to the following implications for the design and implementation of catch-up interventions:

Figure 6 - Actionable Recommendations

**Implications for EiE response**

- **Access and participation:** Safety constraints, irregular attendance, reliance on alternative education modalities, and limited mobility continue to restrict children's consistent participation in learning and catch-up activities. Catch-up programmes should therefore be designed to minimise access barriers by integrating flexible delivery modalities, safe learning spaces, and context appropriate scheduling, particularly in oblasts affected by insecurity, infrastructure damage, and transport challenges.
- **Quality:** Widespread difficulties in understanding lessons and cumulative learning gaps indicate the need for structured, curriculum-aligned catch-up support tailored to age and grade level. Catch-up programmes should prioritise core subjects and address reduced independent learning capacity through guided instruction, interactive approaches, and differentiated support for learners with varying levels of disruption.
- **System strengthening:** Findings underline the need for routine tracking of attendance and learning progression to identify early warning signs for dropout and guide timely support.

*Note: Context-appropriate scheduling refers to organising catch-up activities at times and in formats that align with security conditions, learning modalities, and age-specific needs, including minimising travel during periods of heightened insecurity, accommodating remote or blended learning arrangements, and tailoring session duration and content to sustain children's motivation and participation.*



## 3.2 Learner vulnerability, inclusion, and protection-related barriers

### Overall CP concerns affecting education

Secondary evidence indicates that children in Ukraine continue to experience sustained exposure to violence, insecurity, and fear as a result of the ongoing war, with significant implications for their protection and psychosocial wellbeing. According to the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025, children in conflict-affected areas show marked behavioural changes, including social withdrawal, reluctance to communicate, fear of being outdoors, and a persistent sense of unsafety and isolation. Findings from a 2023 survey by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Pidtrymai Dytynu further highlight children's emotional distress during air raid alerts, with 34% unable to maintain emotional stability and 16% reporting fear; these proportions are higher among children with special educational needs. Exposure to displacement and violence remains widespread, with approximately one-third of surveyed families reporting child displacement and up to one fifth of children having directly witnessed the outbreak of armed conflict<sup>62</sup>.

Primary qualitative data from FGDs and KIs corroborate these concerns. KIs consistently identified security and physical safety risks, notably shelling and frequent air raid alerts, as the most pressing CP issues affecting children's schooling. These risks regularly require movement to shelters, disrupt learning continuity, and contribute to heightened stress. In addition to conflict-related threats, KIs also reported school-based protection concerns, including bullying, exposure to harmful behaviours such as alcohol or psychoactive substances, and elevated psychological strain linked to prolonged learning under insecurity. Within this context, continued engagement in education plays a protective role by reducing social isolation, supporting psychosocial wellbeing, and providing structured, supervised environments for children exposed to chronic stress.

Parents participating in FGDs emphasised the need for regular, practical safety-related training for children, particularly on first aid, general safety, and mine and explosive ordnance risk awareness. Hands-on approaches, including the use of mine replicas and training mannequins, were perceived as especially effective. KIs with education stakeholders further stressed that awareness of CP risks is best strengthened through school-based training, with international organisations supporting capacity building (CB) of teachers, psychologists, and other designated school staff, who then cascade knowledge to students through repeated and structured sessions.

### Child wellbeing and PSS needs in school settings

Quantitative findings indicate that fear and PTSD are widespread among children. Nearly half of surveyed children (49%) reported feeling worried or scared due to bombing or shelling near their area, while 9% identified the absence of a safe shelter at school as a source of fear. Psychosocial and safety-related concerns were also evident in experiences of bullying, with 12% reporting that other children or adults sometimes act in a hurtful or unkind way.

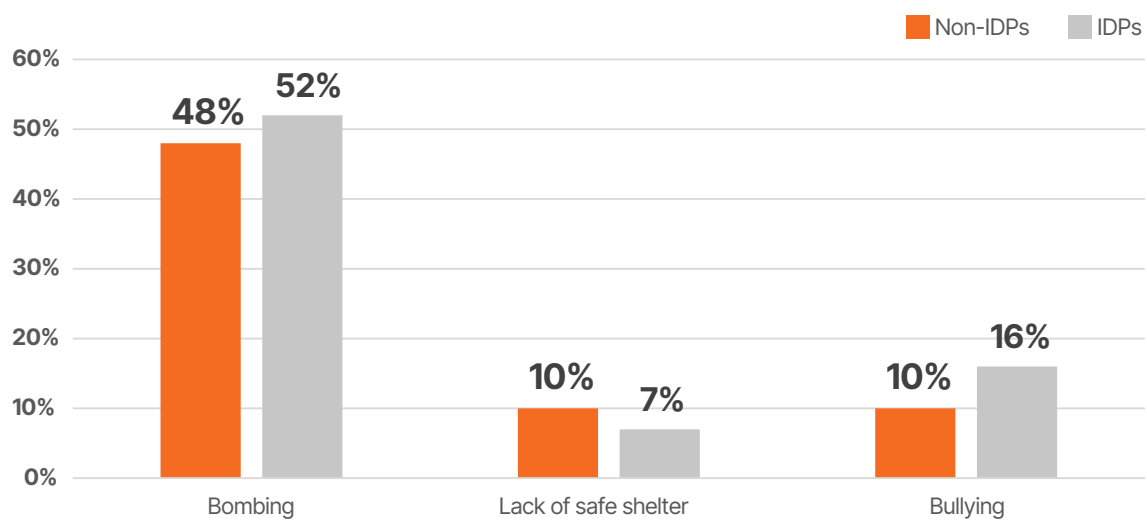
Among those reporting bullying, over half (56%) indicated it occurs rarely, while 44% reported experiencing it sometimes, often, or every day. Broader exposure to protection-related incidents was also reported: 59% of children had seen or heard shelling or attacks, 39% had experienced displacement, and 25% had been unable to attend school or had to stop learning.

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62 Ibid.

Disaggregation by displacement status shows that internally displaced children face heightened psychosocial and social risks. A higher proportion of IDP children reported bullying as a source of fear compared to non-IDPs (16% vs. 10%) (see Figure 7). While the difference in bullying frequency between IDPs and non-IDPs was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.327$ ), IDP children were more likely to report bullying occurring sometimes, often, or every day. These findings align with secondary data from the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025, which highlights increased social tensions between displaced and host communities, parental concerns around stigma and exclusion in new school environments, and risks of discriminatory norms within educational materials that may reinforce exclusionary practices and bullying<sup>63</sup>. Bullying was described by teachers as a means of asserting oneself by putting others down, with particular challenges noted among girls. Teachers highlighted that some internally displaced families are unable to afford adequate clothing for their children, which can lead to misunderstandings, lack of empathy, and bullying among peers, especially affecting IDP girls.

**Figure 7 - Bullying disaggregation by displacement**



Source: Child Survey, October 2025



63 Ibid.

Primary qualitative data further illustrate children's PSD and wellbeing needs within school settings. Teachers reported emotional instability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, low motivation, and social withdrawal among students, linked to ongoing insecurity, repeated air raid alerts, and prolonged distance or online learning. Lack of social interaction was highlighted as a major concern, particularly in schools operating fully online. Teachers also described gender- and age-related manifestations of stress: boys aged 12-13 were reported to have difficulty regulating emotions and, in some cases, to disregard safety procedures during alerts, while girls experienced social pressures related to appearance and peer comparison. Teachers and parents noted that children whose parents are at the front or missing often show withdrawal and emotional distress, regardless of gender.

Across FGDs and KIs, both parents and teachers unanimously identified PSS as a critical unmet need. Teachers reported actively using informal psychosocial approaches, such as regular emotional check-ins, calming exercises, discussions about shared experiences, and age-appropriate support techniques, but stressed that existing services are insufficient. A shortage of specialised professionals, particularly psychologists and speech therapists, was repeatedly cited, with one specialist per school considered inadequate. KIs further indicated that available psychosocial and learning support services remain limited and poorly defined, and do not match the scale or complexity of children's needs. PSS was consistently described as a necessary foundation for children's engagement in learning, particularly when combined with catch-up education and interactive activities. This reflects the INEE Minimum Standards (2024), which recognise learner wellbeing and psychosocial support as essential prerequisites for safe, inclusive, and quality education in emergency and protracted crisis contexts.

### **Children with Disability Focus: Access, Inclusion, and Protection Barriers**

Secondary data and qualitative findings indicate that children with disabilities face additional barriers to education linked to inclusion capacity, accessibility, and availability of specialised support, rather than lack of motivation or willingness to attend school. In remote and blended learning formats, children with disabilities are reported to have lost access to auxiliary staff and specialists who previously provided one-to-one corrective and developmental services. Parents reported that children now have less contact with teachers, alongside an increased volume of homework, which many struggle to complete independently. In rural and remote areas across the assessed oblasts, transportation barriers further restrict access to in-person education for children with disabilities, for whom regular, safe, and predictable transport is a critical enabling factor for inclusion. Secondary data highlight that damaged or insufficient transport infrastructure continues to limit access to schools in Chernihivska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, Kharkivska, and Mykolaivska oblasts, with disproportionate implications for children with disabilities who are less able to travel independently or adapt to frequent changes in learning modality. The Danish Refugee Council Protection Monitoring Report (Oct-Dec 2024) notes that in rural and remote communities, inadequate transport remains a key barrier to accessing education, particularly for children with disabilities<sup>64</sup>. Complementary operational updates from UNOPS and UN-supported education projects report the targeted provision of school buses in Mykolaivska, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, and Zaporizka oblasts, underscoring that transport support remains necessary to enable access to safer learning sites amid ongoing insecurity rather than representing a fully resolved gap<sup>65</sup>. Primary data from FGDs reinforce these findings. In Zaporizka oblast, schools reported that only partial

64 [https://drc.ngo/media/t1glytnm/drc-qpmr\\_october-december\\_2024.pdf](https://drc.ngo/media/t1glytnm/drc-qpmr_october-december_2024.pdf)

65 <https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/keeping-the-heat-on>

transportation is available, and participants explicitly highlighted the need for additional school transport to reduce access barriers for children with disabilities. In Chernihivska oblast, school buses operate only in the absence of air-raid alerts; when services are suspended, responsibility falls entirely on caregivers, resulting in missed schooling for children who cannot travel independently or safely. In Kharkivska oblast, the closure of schools and the absence of transport were reported to prevent parents from accompanying children to learning sites, reinforcing reliance on online education and limiting access to in-person support services. While Mykolaivska and Dnipropetrovska oblasts reported the formal availability of school transport, caregivers and school staff noted that insecurity and parental safety concerns often restrict its use, indicating that transport remains an operational and protection-related constraint for children with disabilities rather than a consistently accessible solution. These challenges are compounded by a critical lack of specialised equipment required for accessible learning, including assistive tools such as hearing aids, screen protectors for light sensitivity, and tactile mathematical materials. Quantitative findings support this gap, with 18% of children with disabilities reporting that they do not have the special tools or equipment that would help them learn.

System-level capacity constraints further limit inclusive education. Secondary sources highlight shortages of practical psychologists and specialists within educational institutions and Inclusive Resource Centres (IRC), as well as insufficient training among existing staff to provide specialised psychological-pedagogical and corrective services tailored to war-related trauma. The destruction of specialised equipment and facilities, particularly in temporarily occupied territories, has left many displaced children with special educational needs without basic learning tools<sup>66</sup>. These findings are reinforced by FGDs with parents and teachers, who reported the absence of specialists such as speech therapists and rehabilitation therapists, and identified the need for classroom or learning assistants, adapted learning programmes, specialised textbooks, and instructional materials that allow lessons to be tailored to individual needs.

KIIs further indicate that administrative and institutional barriers play a significant role in limiting access to inclusive education. Accessing support was described as a complex process requiring engagement with IRC, obtaining formal recommendations, securing support staff, and completing extensive paperwork, which can delay enrolment or discourage continued attendance. KIIs also reported uneven school readiness and inclusive capacity, with some schools described as unprepared or unwilling to implement inclusive education due to limited experience, lack of understanding of procedures, and uncertainty regarding available state subventions and responsibilities.

Distance learning was reported to be particularly challenging for children with disabilities, due to limited specialist support and heavy reliance on caregivers, especially mothers. KIIs noted that parents often assume responsibilities typically held by schools or specialists, including instructional support and supervision. While schools may formally report having support teams and individual education plans, these supports were described as inconsistently implemented or ineffective in practice, particularly in online settings. Children's ability to participate in distance learning was reported to depend on the severity of the disability and the caregiver's capacity to provide sustained support; where this capacity was lacking, children received little or no effective assistance. These challenges compound the broader distance learning constraints experienced by all learners.

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66 [The Strategic Action Plan of the MOES by 2027 | Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine](#)

Physical accessibility emerged as a defining barrier affecting children with disabilities. FGDs with parents and teachers consistently reported inaccessible school infrastructure, including the absence of ramps or elevators, which is especially problematic for children with mobility impairments during emergency situations. School shelters were frequently described as inaccessible due to steep stairs or lack of appropriate adaptations, limiting safe access during air raid alerts. Quantitative responses from children with disabilities indicate that feeling unsafe when going to school (9%) and transport-related costs (9%) were reported as factors making learning difficult, alongside lack of specialised equipment and insufficient teacher support. KIs consistently emphasised that systematic improvements in physical accessibility and compliance with inclusivity standards are essential to enable safe attendance and sustained participation for children with disabilities.

Despite these constraints, teachers and parents reported that children with disabilities generally integrate well socially within school communities and are treated positively by peers. FGDs with teachers indicated few reported cases of skipping classes or formal dropout, with disengagement described as driven primarily by support needs, administrative complexity, and physical and institutional barriers, rather than social exclusion or lack of motivation. Overall, qualitative evidence highlights that inadequate inclusive capacity, administrative burdens, and inaccessible infrastructure are the main factors limiting consistent participation and learning for children with disabilities. This finding directly aligns with the INEE Minimum Standards (2024), which stress the obligation to ensure safe and equitable access to education through reasonable accommodations, inclusive learning environments, and adequately supported teachers.

**Table 8 - Relative risk of exclusion from education among vulnerable groups**

| Vulnerable group                                             | Relative risk of exclusion       | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Children with disabilities</b>                            | Highest risk                     | Face compounding barriers, including inaccessible infrastructure and shelters, lack of specialised equipment, shortages of specialists, administrative hurdles, and heavy reliance on caregivers in distance learning. |
| <b>Children with learning difficulties</b>                   | Highest risk                     | Experience reduced access to individualised and corrective support, particularly in remote and blended learning, increasing risks of disengagement.                                                                    |
| <b>Children affected by widespread psychosocial distress</b> | Highest risk                     | Widespread fear and anxiety undermine concentration, motivation, and sustained engagement in learning.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Internally displaced children</b>                         | Medium-high risk                 | More exposed to psychosocial stress and bullying, alongside adaptation challenges in new school environments.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Gender</b>                                                | No gender-based risks identified | No evidence of systematic gender-based exclusion from education in the assessment findings.                                                                                                                            |

Vulnerable groups were prioritised based on the severity, multiplicity, and persistence of barriers affecting attendance and learning, as evidenced by triangulated quantitative, qualitative, and secondary data (see Table 8). Children with disabilities face the highest risk of exclusion due to intersecting physical, institutional, administrative, and support-related constraints that directly limit safe access and sustained participation. Children with learning difficulties also face elevated risk, particularly in remote and blended learning contexts where individualised support has diminished. Internally displaced children experience heightened psychosocial and social risks, including bullying and adaptation challenges, placing them at medium-high risk of irregular attendance.

### **Referral pathway awareness, accessibility, and service capacity (incl. help-seeking barriers)**

At the inter-agency level, a formal and standardised referral pathway exists in Ukraine and is intended to be used when protection concerns are identified. Referrals are guided by the Individual Protection Referrals in Ukraine – Minimum Standards (May 2022)<sup>67</sup>, which apply to protection referrals across population groups and sectors, and are not specific to children or to education settings. These standards outline a clear, multi-step process and establish a legally grounded framework for coordination across sectors (see Figure 8). In line with these standards, the primary receiver of a protection referral in Ukraine is the competent local authority, particularly in Child Protection and GBV cases.

**Figure 8 - Overview of the Inter-Agency CP Referral Pathway**

The inter-agency referral pathway (IRF) comprises nine sequential steps, guiding cases from the initial identification of a child CP concern through referral, follow-up, and formal closure once services are initiated.

The process begins with initial identification and basic information collection or assessment (depending on whether the actor is a technical protection specialist), followed by selection of an appropriate service provider, obtaining informed consent, and secure information transfer. Referrals are then communicated directly to service providers, with mandatory follow-up timelines that differ for urgent and non-urgent cases.

The pathway emphasizes do-no-harm principles, strict consent requirements, and immediate re-referral if services are delayed, rejected, or unavailable. A referral is considered closed only once the child has started receiving the required protection service.

**"Catch-up classes without psychological support are empty; you can teach pure math, but interactive activities help ensure that children actually come to the lessons and stay engaged" (KII - Education Cluster).**

67 Individual Protection Referrals in Ukraine - Minimum Standards [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

Within educational settings, school staff are initially guided by national education legislation and sector-specific procedures, including the Law of Ukraine “On Education” (2017, Articles 30 and 53), which obliges school principals to notify the police, inform the Service for Children’s Affairs, and formally inform parents or guardians, in writing, within one day of identifying or receiving a report of violence or bullying. This is further operationalised through Ministry of Education and Science, the MoES Order No. 1646 (2019), “On Approval of the Procedure for Considering Applications and Reports on Cases of Bullying (Harassment) in Educational Institutions,” provides a formal mechanism for schools to respond to bullying, including procedures for reporting, documentation, and referral to competent authorities.

However, triangulated evidence indicates a persistent gap between the formal existence of referral mechanisms and their functionality in practice, particularly in terms of visibility, accessibility, and consistent use at school and community levels.

At school level, referral mechanisms are generally understood by teachers as existing and operational, but awareness and accessibility remain uneven among caregivers and children. Teachers participating in FGDs consistently described school-based referral systems as functional and multi-disciplinary, involving class teachers, school management, psychologists, nurses, and social pedagogues, with escalation to external actors such as CP services, social services, juvenile police, medical services, and school police officers when required. However, KIs suggest that while referral structures exist, their practical functioning varies, particularly with regard to follow-up, feedback from service providers, and clarity on next steps once a referral is initiated.

At the same time, FGDs with parents revealed limited awareness of these mechanisms: caregivers commonly reported that they were unaware of referral pathways and had never had to use them. This disconnect suggests that while referral procedures may be institutionally embedded within schools, they are not consistently communicated to or understood by families.

Children’s reported help-seeking behaviour further reflects this limited visibility of formal referral pathways. Quantitative survey data show that nearly half of children (49%) do not know whether they or another child has accessed a service that helps in situations of distress or difficulty, while only 27% report that they have. When children do seek support, they are far more likely to turn to informal networks, friends (56%) or parents or someone at home (45%), than to formal school-based actors such as teachers or school psychologists (17%). Notably, 19% reported not talking to anyone, and 14% explicitly stated that they do not want to talk to teachers or a psychologist. These patterns align with parents’ accounts of low awareness of referral systems and suggest limited trust, familiarity, or perceived accessibility of formal support channels from the child’s perspective. No statistically significant differences were observed across oblasts.

System-level capacity constraints further shape how referral pathways function in practice, reinforcing gaps identified by parents and children. Secondary sources report shortages of trained psychologists and inclusive education specialists within schools, while available psychosocial staff often lack specialised expertise to address war-related trauma<sup>68</sup>. These constraints were echoed in KIs, which highlighted high levels of teacher burnout, frequent staff turnover, and limited coordination experience between education authorities and humanitarian

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68 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

actors, factors that slow response times and complicate referral processes. KIs also noted that referral information is not always kept up to date and that schools and service providers are not consistently familiar with one another's roles, undermining effective follow-up.

Despite reported awareness-raising efforts, the operationalisation of referral pathways remains inconsistent. Teachers described regular activities aimed at informing children and parents about safety risks, bullying, and available support services, as well as multiple reporting channels for children, including trusted adults, hotlines, trust boxes, and email contacts. However, KIs qualified these accounts by noting that teachers often receive only basic training in recognising protection risks and lack clear, step-by-step guidance for managing complex, recurring, or multi-agency cases. This helps explain why, despite the presence of reporting mechanisms, children continue to rely primarily on informal support and why caregivers remain uncertain about how and when referrals should be initiated.

Taken together, triangulated evidence indicates that referral pathways in education settings are legally grounded and structurally established, but their functional effectiveness in practice remains uneven, particularly in terms of awareness, follow-up, coordination, and feedback. Teachers generally perceive referral systems as existing and functional, while parents and children report limited awareness and reliance on informal support networks. KI-based evidence highlights capacity, coordination, and training gaps that constrain consistent functionality, pointing to the need for clearer operational guidance, strengthened communication with families, and reinforced service capacity to bridge the gap between formal referral frameworks and lived help-seeking practices in schools.

### Key Take-away

Given the CP risks, psychosocial stressors, and help-seeking barriers identified in school settings, the findings highlight the following key challenges affecting learners' wellbeing and engagement in education:



Figure 9 - Actionable Recommendations

**Implications for EiE response**

- **PSS:** To mitigate widespread fear, anxiety, and emotional distress affecting learning and wellbeing, structured non-specialised PSS activities should be delivered for children aged 6-17 years within school and learning environments.
- **School-based referral strengthening:** To close gaps in awareness and utilisation of protection services, school-based referral systems should be strengthened by improving communication to caregivers and children about available support options, and by enhancing the capacity of teachers and psychologists to use intersectoral referral pathways, ensuring that formal mechanisms become visible, trusted, and consistently used across school communities.
- **Awareness and social cohesion:** To address bullying, stigma, and limited help-seeking, targeted awareness-raising initiatives targeting children, parents, and school staff should be implemented. These initiatives should not only build general awareness but also equip both adults and children with practical skills to identify protection concerns, respond safely, and support peers, fostering social cohesion, individual well-being within learning spaces.
- **Mine risk awareness:** To reduce exposure to explosive hazards affecting attendance, safety, and psychosocial wellbeing, age-appropriate mine risk awareness activities should be integrated into school-based programming and learning environments, particularly in frontline and retaken areas, and delivered in coordination with relevant protection and mine action actors.
- **Support for children with disabilities:** To ensure equitable access and participation, EiE interventions should strengthen inclusive education approaches by supporting reasonable accommodations, adapted learning materials, accessible infrastructure, and teacher capacity to respond to the learning and protection needs of children with disabilities.



### 3.3 Education workforce and caregiver constraints

Findings from both secondary and primary data indicate that teachers and caregivers are operating under sustained psychological strain, high workloads, and ongoing disruption, with direct consequences for children's learning, wellbeing, and engagement in education. At the system level, war-related trauma, repeated air raid alerts, power outages, and unstable security conditions have reduced educators' work capacity and increased stress, with more than half of teachers reporting professional burnout. Approximately 54% of teachers report professional burnout, alongside heightened stress, anxiety, increased workloads, and time-management pressures caused by repeated disruptions to the education process. These conditions are reported to undermine teachers' ability to deliver quality education, particularly in the absence of adequate training and resources to address children's trauma, provide Psychological First Aid (PFA), or teach in inclusive and conflict-sensitive settings<sup>69</sup>.

Primary qualitative findings align with this broader picture. Teachers and caregivers reported operating under prolonged stress and competing demands, which they perceived as directly affecting children's learning continuity, emotional wellbeing, and engagement with education. Teachers described balancing instructional responsibilities with crisis-related tasks, while caregivers reported struggling to support learning and emotional needs at home due to their own stress and limited capacity. Together, these constraints were perceived to affect the quality of instruction, consistency of learning support, and children's ability to recover academically and psychosocially from prolonged disruptions.

**"High levels of teacher burnout; a teacher's workday lasts up to 10 hours (6 lessons + 4 hours for checking notebooks)" (FGD - Teachers, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast).**

#### Teacher-related patterns

Need for training and capacity strengthening (including PSS for children):

Teachers described participating in a range of online and in-person trainings, including subject-specific courses and PSS initiatives, which were generally perceived as useful and engaging. However, many teachers reported that these trainings added to existing workload pressures, as they were often scheduled alongside full teaching responsibilities and required assignments to be completed outside working hours. Respondents consistently expressed a preference for practical, hands-on, specialist-led trainings, particularly on calming distressed children, managing classrooms in crisis contexts, identifying and referring concerns, supporting children with special educational needs, and applying inclusive teaching approaches in disrupted settings. Training related to innovative technologies, time management, and updated pedagogical standards was also perceived as necessary. Secondary sources reinforce these findings, many teachers lack sufficient preparation to provide PFA, respond to children's trauma, or teach effectively in inclusive and conflict-affected settings. In this context, 46% of teachers identified training in mental health and MHPSS and PFA as a priority, while one third of teachers in conflict affected oblasts reported a need for additional training on effective online education practices<sup>70</sup>.

69 Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2023-2025 [EN/UK] - Ukraine | ReliefWeb

70 Ibid.

## Need for PSS for teachers themselves

Secondary data highlight high levels of burnout, stress, and anxiety among teachers, compounded by increased workloads, unstable working conditions, and insufficient material and financial support. Nearly half of teachers identified salary increases as a necessary form of support, while over 70% highlighted the need for IT devices, stable internet connectivity, and reliable electricity to sustain quality teaching<sup>71</sup>. These pressures represent not only individual wellbeing concerns but also a system-level constraint, as teacher stress directly affects the quality, consistency, and safety of education provision in EiE settings.

Primary findings further illustrate how these pressures are experienced at the individual level. Teachers described emotional exhaustion, stress, and frustration, particularly in relation to overlapping responsibilities, self-funded training, and perceived lack of appreciation for their work. Sustained exhaustion undermines lesson quality, classroom management, and teachers' ability to provide basic psychosocial support to students, particularly during periods of repeated disruption and insecurity. Some teachers reported that PSS is available through local or regional structures, though access was described as uneven and information on services limited. In-person group sessions, wellbeing focused activities, and psychological relief initiatives were perceived as particularly beneficial for stress reduction, emotional recovery, and burnout prevention. Teachers also reported that material support, paid trainings, and adequate equipment would indirectly improve wellbeing by reducing financial and time-related strain. From a system perspective, these supports were described as enabling teachers to maintain regular engagement, manage classrooms more effectively, and sustain learner support functions. Overall, teachers perceived that without structured PSS and realistic workload management, their capacity to support children effectively remains constrained, posing a risk to learning continuity and the delivery of protective and supportive school environments.

**“There is definitely not enough training for all specialists. For example, there’s generally a shortage of psychologists....and that’s not only in the education sector but across all sectors. Especially qualified and well-trained ones.... that’s a real problem” (KII – MHPSS TWG).**

## Caregiver-related patterns

Need for sustained communication, presence, and collaboration with schools

Caregivers consistently reported valuing regular communication and collaboration with teachers and schools. Many described feeling included in decision-making related to their children's education through surveys, school committees, and ongoing contact with class teachers and school psychologists. Teachers' efforts to share learning materials, provide guidance, and offer additional explanations to both children and parents were widely perceived as supportive.

At the same time, both teachers and caregivers described challenges in parental engagement. Teachers reported that some parents are difficult to reach, less responsive, or perceived education and CP as solely the school's responsibility. Caregivers, in turn, described practical barriers to engagement, including work commitments, stress, and daily survival pressures linked to the war. Key informants emphasised that stronger school-parent communication, regular presence at school, and joint school-family activities contribute to trust-building, a sense of safety, and improved engagement in education, particularly for younger children.

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71 Ibid.

**“It is very difficult for parents—they bear full responsibility for their children’s education, while teachers are only available online. Parents must both earn money and educate their children” (FGD - Parents, Kharkiv Oblast).**

### **Need for PSS for caregivers**

Caregivers consistently self-reported a strong need for psychosocial and emotional support for themselves, recognising that their wellbeing directly affects their ability to support their children. Many caregivers perceived counselling, stress-management support, and guidance on responding to children’s emotional needs as particularly important. Parents reported that children often feel more comfortable opening up to caregivers than to school psychologists, increasing the need for caregiver-focused support.

Caregivers also described interest in group-based psychosocial sessions and community activities that allow families to connect, communicate, and support one another. Stress relief and interest-based activities for adults were perceived as essential complements to child-focused interventions. KIs further highlighted psychoeducation, parenting support sessions, and individual or group consultations as effective mechanisms to strengthen caregivers’ capacity to support children’s learning and wellbeing. Overall, caregivers perceived that addressing adult psychosocial wellbeing is critical to sustaining children’s educational engagement and recovery in a protracted crisis context.

### **Key Take-away**

Given the sustained psychological strain, workload pressures, and support gaps affecting teachers and caregivers, the findings point to the following key challenges undermining learning continuity and quality:

#### **Figure 10 - Actionable Recommendations**

##### **Implications for EiE response**

**Teacher capacity:** To address reduced instructional quality and limited capacity to support learning recovery, targeted CB workshops should be conducted for teachers on catch-up delivery, integration of PSS, and peer exchange of practical strategies for teaching in crisis-affected settings.

**Teacher wellbeing:** To mitigate high levels of burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion among educators, structured psychosocial and wellbeing support should be provided to teachers to sustain their ability to support children’s learning and wellbeing.

## 4. SAFE ACCESS TO SCHOOLING AND PROTECTION RISKS IN AND AROUND

This section will document safety-related conditions that affect children's ability to travel to school safely and learn in a protective environment, drawing from community and school perspectives:

### 4.1 Safety on the way to school

Safety along the route to school remains a major barrier to children's access to in-person education, shaped by both widespread security threats and household-level risk perceptions. Secondary sources indicate that persistent insecurity, including shelling, missile strikes, and extensive landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination, continues to severely limit safe physical access to schools across at least 11 regions in Ukraine. According to the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy (2023-2025), proximity to active hostilities and borders has resulted in frequent security incidents affecting education facilities and surrounding areas, increasing risks for children and education personnel. Explosive hazards have been reported near schools in several assessed oblasts, including Kharkivska, Chernihivska, Mykolaivska, Dnipropetrovska, and Zaporizka, creating unpredictable and potentially lethal risks for children travelling to school, particularly in areas adjacent to the international border and communities where Government of Ukraine control has been restored. These conditions have also contributed to repeated class cancellations and a continued reliance on remote learning modalities in areas exposed to heavy artillery and missile attacks<sup>72</sup>.

Primary qualitative findings from FGDs with parents reflect how these broader security conditions directly shape children's day-to-day access to school. Caregivers consistently reported that school transportation is only available when there are no air raid alerts or active shelling, limiting its reliability as a safe and consistent access mechanism. While shelters were identified as a key protective measure provided by schools, parents emphasised that access to school during periods of heightened insecurity remains constrained, reinforcing concerns about children's safety while commuting and influencing decisions to keep children at home during volatile periods.

**"If, for example, an alert occurs at 7:00 AM, the buses do not operate. In such cases, the responsibility falls entirely on the parents" (FGD - Parents, Chernihiv Oblast).**

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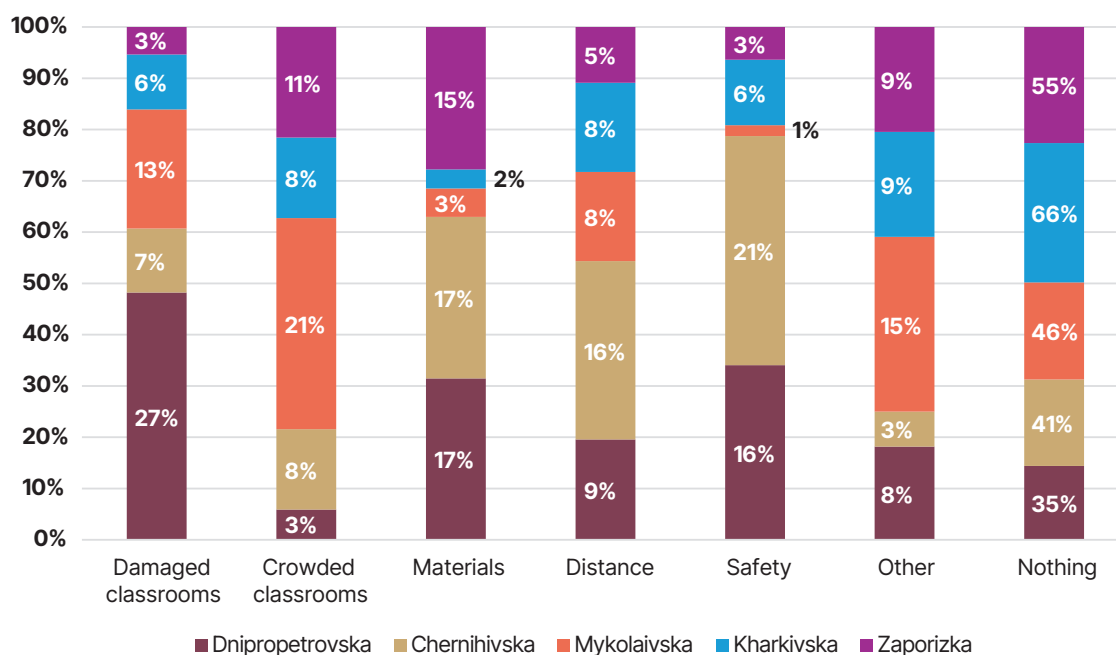
72 Ibid.

## 4.2 Safety at school: infrastructure and protective environments

Secondary evidence indicates that safety risks within school environments remain a critical barrier to effective in-person learning across conflict-affected oblasts. Ongoing shelling, missile strikes, and explosive contamination in surrounding areas continue to undermine the safety of learning spaces, even where school buildings remain partially functional. The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance near educational facilities remains a major obstacle to the resumption of face-to-face education, particularly in frontline areas and communities where Government of Ukraine control has been restored, and repeated security incidents necessitate frequent movement to shelters during school hours<sup>73</sup>.

Quantitative findings reflect how these risks translate into concrete infrastructure-related challenges at school level. Although 45% of children reported no problems with their school building or access, a substantial proportion identified safety concerns, including unsafe or damaged classrooms or toilets (14%), lack of a safe place or shelter during emergencies (12%), and difficulties related to distance or transportation (10%). Overcrowding was reported by 8% of respondents. These challenges vary by oblast, with higher reporting of unsafe or damaged facilities and lack of shelters in Dnipropetrovska and Chernihivska, and higher levels of overcrowding in Mykolaivska. Shortages of books, furniture, and internet connectivity were also reported more frequently in Dnipropetrovska (17%), Chernihivska (17%), and Zaporizka (15%), further constraining the functionality of school environments during both routine instruction and emergencies. Infrastructure related challenges across the assessed oblasts are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11 - Infrastructure-related challenges



Source: Child Survey, October 2025

73 Ibid.

Children's perceptions of safety underscore the psychological dimension of these infrastructure constraints. Nearly half of surveyed children (49%) reported feeling worried or scared due to bombing or shelling near their area, while 9% specifically cited the absence of a safe shelter at school as a source of fear. Despite these concerns, most children reported having received safety training at school: 83% indicated that they had been trained on how to respond during emergencies such as fire or shelling, and a further 16% believed they would know what to do even without formal training. Only 1% reported not knowing how to respond, with no statistically significant differences observed across oblasts ( $p = 0.243$ ).

Teachers emerge as a key protective factor within this constrained environment. The majority of children (87%) reported confidence that their teachers know how to keep them and other students safe during emergencies, while only 3% expressed a lack of confidence. This perception suggests that, alongside physical infrastructure and safety measures, teacher preparedness contributes significantly to children's sense of protection within schools, even where material conditions are suboptimal.

Qualitative findings from FGDs with teachers provide further insight into the limitations of protective infrastructure and its impact on learning continuity. Teachers consistently described shelters as overcrowded, damp, and poorly equipped, often lacking ventilation, internet connectivity, water, sanitation facilities, and basic learning materials. In Dnipropetrovska oblast, teachers reported shelters affected by mould, poor ventilation, and inadequate sanitary conditions, noting that the absence of class divisions within shelters complicates supervision and classroom management. Frequent air raid alerts and explosions were reported to cause repeated interruptions to lessons, undermining educational planning and reducing learning continuity.

**"Everyone agreed that the shelter is the biggest problem. If there were a good shelter where classes could be conducted without such major interruptions, it would be excellent... Moreover, it's damp, there's mold... There's no ventilation inside." (FGD - Teachers, Dnipropetrovska Oblast).**

Beyond shelters, teachers highlighted broader infrastructure constraints affecting both safety and learning. These included power outages, unstable or absent internet connectivity, and shortages of essential teaching equipment, which were described as limiting the ability to deliver lessons during sheltering periods as well as undermining distance and blended learning modalities. FGDs with parents further highlighted that frequent power outages and inadequate heating result in cold classrooms during winter months, negatively affecting children's comfort and ability to concentrate. Teachers also noted gaps in supportive infrastructure, including undersized or poorly equipped resource rooms, lack of sensory or calm spaces, and overcrowded classrooms, which reduce schools' capacity to support children's regulation, wellbeing, and inclusive learning needs. School libraries were reported to exist in most schools but often require repairs, improved equipment, and more conducive learning environments.

KIs reinforce these findings and highlight minimum safety and infrastructure requirements for safe schooling. KIs emphasised that functional shelters are a legal prerequisite for school operation and stressed the importance of equipping shelters with desks and learning materials to enable educational activities to continue during air raid alerts. The installation of shatter-resistant window safety film was repeatedly identified as a minimum protective measure to reduce injury risks from broken glass during attacks. KIs also pointed to the construction of

underground schools as an effective approach to improving safety and accessibility in high-risk areas, alongside interim measures such as providing power banks to address frequent power outages and learning kits to support children in frontline contexts where household resources are limited.

Taken together, triangulated evidence indicates that safety at school is shaped by the interaction of physical infrastructure, protective measures, and human capacity. While many schools continue to operate under highly constrained conditions, persistent security threats, inadequate shelters, and infrastructure gaps continue to disrupt learning and undermine children's sense of safety. At the same time, teacher preparedness and safety training play a critical mitigating role, partially offsetting material limitations but not fully compensating for the structural risks affecting school environments.

### **Safety mitigation gaps affecting attendance**

While multiple safety measures are in place, including the provision of shelters, safety training for children, and teacher preparedness, the findings indicate that existing mitigation measures are insufficient to fully offset security risks and enable consistent attendance. Shelter availability emerges as a critical gap: although shelters are legally required and widely present, qualitative evidence shows that many are overcrowded, damp, poorly ventilated, and inadequately equipped, limiting their protective function and making it difficult to continue learning during prolonged air raid alerts. The lack of adequate space and class separation within shelters further constrains supervision and classroom management, particularly during extended sheltering periods.

Preparedness measures also show limitations in practice. While most children report having received safety training and express confidence in teachers' emergency response capacity, frequent and prolonged air raid alerts continue to result in repeated lesson interruptions, indicating that preparedness alone does not mitigate the cumulative impact of insecurity on learning continuity. In addition, gaps in infrastructure support, such as unstable electricity, lack of internet connectivity, and insufficient learning materials, reduce schools' ability to sustain educational activities during emergencies, even where shelters are accessible.

Along routes to school, mitigation options remain particularly limited. Transportation services are described as conditional on the absence of active shelling or air raid alerts, resulting in unpredictable access and reinforcing household decisions to keep children at home during volatile periods. This suggests that current safety measures do not adequately address risks associated with daily travel to school, especially in frontline and retaken areas affected by explosive contamination.

Overall, the analysis indicates that while safety measures contribute to risk reduction, gaps in shelter capacity, infrastructure adequacy, and the ability to sustain learning during emergencies remain key constraints. These gaps help explain continued reliance on remote learning and irregular attendance and point to the need for prioritised investments in functional shelters, equipment, and emergency-adapted learning conditions to translate safety measures into effective access. Addressing these safety gaps is essential to restoring education as a protective, stabilising service rather than a conditional or intermittent activity.

## Key Take-away

Given the persistent security threats affecting access to schools and the continued gaps in protective infrastructure within school environments, the findings point to the following implications for strengthening safety and protection measures in and around schools:

Figure 12 - Actionable Recommendations

### Implications for EiE response

- **Safety awareness:** To address ongoing risks related to shelling, landmines, unexploded ordnance, and emergency situations that affect children, teachers, and caregivers, conduct safety and preparedness awareness activities, including mine risk awareness training sessions, at school level.
- **Infrastructure assessment:** To respond to uneven shelter conditions and safety gaps within school facilities, conduct technical safety assessments of school infrastructure, including shelters, by an external specialist.
- **Protective upgrades:** To improve the safety and functionality of learning environments during emergencies, implement light rehabilitation works for selected school shelters and procure essential school safety items.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are organised in line with DG EiE pillars to ensure a clear link between identified needs, evidence from the assessment, and proposed actions.

## Immediate priorities - restoring safe access and mitigating protection risks

### 1. Strengthen safe access to education through context-specific safety and shelter measures

*(EiE Pillar: Access | Protection)*

Given that security risks, blast variability, and prolonged air raid alerts remain the primary barriers to regular attendance, EiE interventions should prioritise safe, predictable access to learning.

- In Kharkivska and Zaporizka, where active hostilities, infrastructure damage, and prolonged reliance on remote learning are most pronounced, priority should be given to risk-mitigated delivery modalities, improved shelter conditions within schools, and flexible scheduling that accommodates frequent alerts.
- In Chernihivska, where security risks are linked to border proximity rather than displacement volume, interventions should focus on safe access routes, emergency preparedness, and continuity planning to maintain attendance during recurrent disruptions.
- In Mykolaivska, where attendance is high but dropout is elevated, targeted measures should address learning continuity and retention, including safe in person or blended options and re-engagement of children who have disengaged.
- In Dnipropetrovska, where schools remain largely operational but are increasingly affected by intermittent security incidents, air raid alerts, and pressure on infrastructure, EiE responses should prioritise maintaining continuity of in-person and blended learning under fluctuating security conditions. This includes strengthening school-level emergency preparedness, improving the functionality and usability of shelters during alerts, and supporting flexible scheduling and attendance management to reduce learning disruption during recurrent interruptions.

Across all oblasts, shelter improvements and safety measures should be treated as access-enabling and protective interventions, not only infrastructure upgrades.

## **Medium-term priorities - learning recovery, workforce support, and system strengthening**

### **2. Address learning loss through structured, curriculum-aligned catch-up education**

*(EiE Pillar: Quality)*

Learning gaps driven by repeated disruption and shifts between face-to-face, blended, and remote modalities require systematic learning recovery approaches.

- Deliver structured, curriculum-aligned catch-up education in line with MoES guidance, focusing on core subjects most affected by disruption.
- Adapt delivery modalities by oblast, ensuring that catch-up activities remain feasible under varying security conditions and do not increase protection risks.
- Integrate catch-up programming with teacher capacity building to ensure consistent instructional quality, even during intermittent disruptions.

### **3. Reinforce protection and MHPSS through clearer referral pathways and school-level capacity**

*(EiE Pillar: Protection | MHPSS)*

While formal child protection referral pathways exist, findings indicate limited awareness and utilisation, particularly among caregivers and children. Strengthening referrals is therefore essential to education's protective function.

- Systematically reinforce referral pathway awareness at school and community levels, including:
  - o clear, child-friendly and caregiver-friendly explanations of when and how referrals are triggered;
  - o clarification of the roles of teachers, school psychologists, social pedagogues, and external services.
- Support schools to operationalise referral pathways, through practical guidance, role clarification, and regular coordination with child protection and MHPSS actors.
- Expand access to non-specialised MHPSS activities within schools, aligned with the IASC MHPSS Pyramid, to address widespread distress and reduce escalation to specialised services.
- Tailor protection responses in oblasts with higher displacement and social tension to address bullying and inclusion risks, particularly for internally displaced children.

## **4. Support teacher capacity and wellbeing as a prerequisite for EiE delivery**

*(EiE Pillar: Teachers)*

Teachers' ability to deliver quality education under crisis conditions is constrained by sustained stress, high workloads, and repeated disruption.

- Provide practical, workload-sensitive training focused on: o delivery of catch-up education; o inclusive education practices; o integration of psychosocial support into daily teaching.
- Introduce structured teacher wellbeing support, recognising that teacher resilience is essential for sustaining safe, protective, and responsive learning environments, particularly in oblasts experiencing frequent alerts and prolonged disruption.

## **5. Strengthen system coordination and caregiver engagement to sustain access**

*(EiE Pillar: System Strengthening)*

Caregivers play a central role in sustaining children's education but face significant stress and limited awareness of available support services.

- Strengthen school-family communication and collaboration, particularly around safety procedures, learning expectations under blended or remote modalities, and referral options.
- Deliver caregiver-focused psychoeducation to support children's learning and wellbeing during periods of heightened insecurity.
- At system level, reinforce coordination between education, child protection, and MHPSS actors to ensure consistent guidance, referral follow-up, and adaptive responses across oblasts.



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