

REPORT

**“WE CAN REBUILD SCHOOLS,
BUT NOT CHILDHOODS”:**

**EDUCATION UNDER FIRE
IN UKRAINE (2014-2025)**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Names in this report have been changed to protect the identities of those featured in the stories.

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Cover photo: Interior of the damaged school outside of Kyiv.
Photo credit: Oleksandr Khomenko/Save the Children

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INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Ukraine represents one of the most profound and devastating casualties of prolonged war. This report examines the cumulative impact of over a decade of crisis on the nation's education system, tracing the trajectory from the onset of conflict in 2014 through the COVID-19 pandemic to the full-scale escalation in 2022. Based on qualitative evidence collected from frontline regions, this analysis reveals not merely disrupted learning, but systemic degradation that threatens to create a lost generation of Ukrainian children.

The evidence presented here demonstrates that Ukraine's education system has not suffered isolated shocks but rather "a relentless accumulation of crises that has left the system in a state of chronic stress."

Each successive crisis has compounded unresolved issues from previous ones, creating a snowball effect of learning loss that has accelerated dramatically since February 2022.

The consequences extend beyond academic performance to encompass profound psychosocial impacts, structural inequities, and fundamental transformations in education itself.

This report serves as both documentation of the crisis and a call to action for international stakeholders, policymakers, and humanitarian organizations. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address not only immediate operational challenges but also the deep-seated psychological and structural impacts of prolonged conflict on Ukrainian education.





Photo: Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

THE 11-YEAR TRAJECTORY OF EDUCATIONAL DEGRADATION

PRE-2014: A FOUNDATION UNDERMINED

Before 2014, Ukraine's education system operated under the traditional Ukrainian school model, characterized by live communication and established pedagogical practices. This period, while not without its challenges, provided a foundation of educational infrastructure and expectations that would soon be severely tested. The system relied on physical classrooms, direct teacher-student interaction, and a relatively stable curriculum that had evolved over decades.

The transition from this baseline represents one of the most significant educational disruptions in modern European history. What began as a geographically limited armed conflict in 2014 gradually metastasized into a comprehensive crisis that would ultimately engulf the entire educational infrastructure of the nation. War did not merely interrupt education, it fundamentally transformed its purpose, delivery, and outcomes.

THE 2014-2019 PERIOD: ADAPTATION UNDER DURESS

The onset of conflict in 2014 marked the beginning of what education stakeholders describe as a "constant adaptation to crisis conditions." Schools in eastern Ukraine found themselves on the front lines, forced to balance educational delivery with the immediate realities of insecurity.

However, this resilience came at a cost. The New Ukrainian School (NUS) initiative, launched in 2016, represented an ambitious reform agenda aimed at modernizing pedagogical approaches and aligning Ukrainian education with European standards. Between 2016 and 2019, significant progress was made toward these goals, with updates to curricula, teacher training programs, and educational infrastructure.

Yet the conflict environment created fundamental tensions between reform ambitions and crisis realities. Schools in affected regions struggled to implement new methodologies while simultaneously addressing safety concerns, displacement, and resource constraints. The period established a pattern of interrupted progress that would characterize Ukrainian education for the next decade.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SYSTEMIC STRESS TEST

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 represented a systemic stress test that exposed deep vulnerabilities within the Ukrainian education system. While the pandemic affected educational systems globally, its impact on Ukraine was uniquely compounded by the existing context of conflict. The transition to remote learning encountered massive technical unpreparedness, particularly in regions already experiencing infrastructure challenges.

This period created what stakeholders describe as a "significant drop in foundational knowledge" as students adapted to digital modalities without adequate support. The pandemic forced a rapid acceleration of digitalization that the system was not prepared to handle. Teachers, already stretched thin by conflict-related demands, were required to master new technologies and methodologies overnight.

More critically, the pandemic disrupted the social fabric of education, removing peer interactions, and structured environments that are essential for childhood development. The isolation of 2020-2021 would later be recognized as a critical inflection point in the psychosocial development of Ukrainian children.

THE FULL-SCALE ESCALATION: SYSTEMIC FRAGMENTATION

The full-scale war in February 2022 marked the most devastating blow to Ukrainian education since 2014. What had been a system operating under chronic stress was now facing acute crisis on multiple fronts. The escalation transformed education from primarily an academic pursuit to an exercise in survival and psychological resilience.

The full-scale war introduced new dimensions of disruption: mass displacement, widespread infrastructure destruction, prolonged air raid alerts, and the physical endangerment of educational facilities. Schools became targets – 4,456 educational institutions were damaged by bombing and shelling, while 408 of them were completely destroyed since February 2022*. Teachers faced life-threatening conditions, and students experienced trauma on an unprecedented scale.

Perhaps most significantly, the 2022 escalation eliminated the possibility of recovery that had been possible in the earlier conflict period. Where the 2014–2021 period alternated between intensification and relative calm, the post-2022 environment has been characterized as a continuous, nationwide disruption and instability.



Photo: Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

From Years Online to a Real Classroom: Stefaniia's* Story

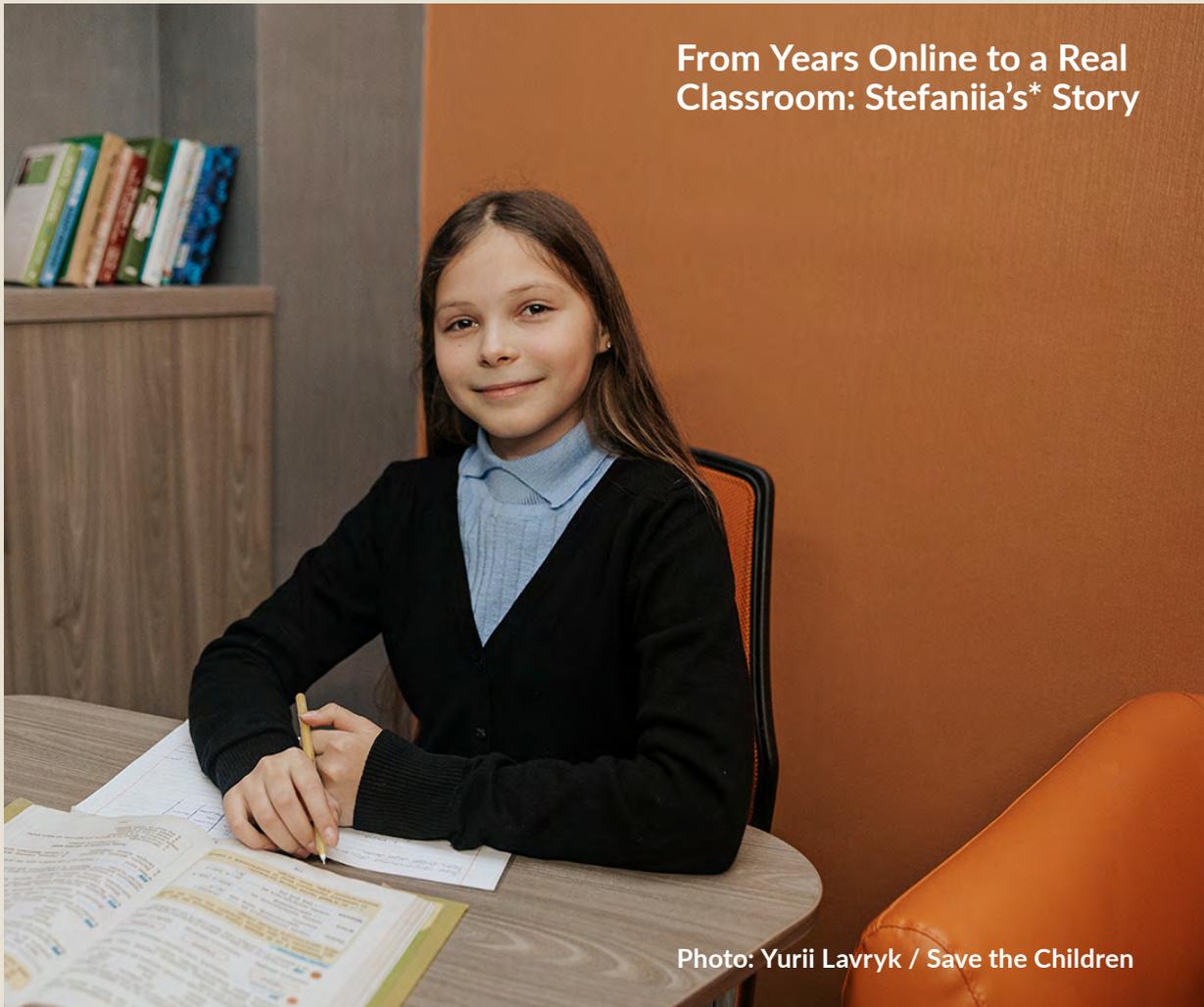


Photo: Yuri Lavryk / Save the Children

Stefaniia*, 11 lives in a frontline city Sumy in Ukraine. Due to its proximity to the frontline – just around 20 kilometres, Sumy was one of the first cities to come under attack and experienced intense shelling, airstrikes, and ongoing military pressure from the early days of the war.

Stefaniia* entered school in 2019. After half a year of offline learning, she was forced to study online because of Covid-19 pandemic. Some months she was allowed to attend school in person. Then in 2022, the war began, and the girl had no classes at all for almost 3 months. Then the school was opened in online format only.

For years, Stefaniia* studied online. Power outages, unstable internet connection, and constant interruptions made learning exhausting and confusing. “The teacher’s

video was constantly freezing,” the girl says. Often, she could not hear or understand the lesson. Instead of feeling motivated, Stefania felt frustrated and disconnected. Her mother Kseniia*, 38, recalls that online learning shifted much responsibility onto parents, while children lost opportunities to communicate, build independence, and develop social skills.

Everything changed for Stefaniia* when her school was able to resume offline learning in a renovated shelter supported by Save the Children and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. For the first time in years, she returned home excited. She could sit next to her classmates, talk freely, ask questions, and truly understand the lessons. “Offline school gives me positive emotions,” she says. “I have friends, I can communicate, I can learn better.”

CURRENT REALITIES: EDUCATION AS SURVIVAL

THE SAFETY DIVIDE

In 2025, Ukrainian education operates under a fundamental paradox: while formal educational availability persists, actual accessibility is dictated by local security conditions and technical resources. This has created what stakeholders term the "safety divide," a geographic and economic stratification where educational quality varies dramatically based on proximity to conflict zones and access to resources.

In frontline oblasts like Sumy, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv, the learning environment is frequently disrupted. Air raid alerts lasting up to 14 hours can effectively end instructional days, forcing schools to operate in constant emergency-response mode. To maintain continuity of education, some schools are built as fully underground schools, while many existing schools have adapted basements into shelters to allow instruction

to continue despite safety risks. Some shelters remain minimally equipped, with multiple classes taking turns in shared basement or tunnel spaces, while more developed underground schools provide separated classroom areas and basic infrastructure to support more structured instruction.

Even with these adaptations, significant challenges remain. Shelters often have poor ventilation and acoustics, making focused teaching difficult. Classes are frequently combined or rotated, and learning is fragmented, occurring only in short bursts between alerts. In these conditions, children spend much of their time waiting for notifications that it is safe to leave, limiting the continuity and quality of their educational experience.



Photo: Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

THE DIGITAL IMPERATIVE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The digital transformation of Ukrainian education, accelerated by both pandemic and war, has created new opportunities and profound challenges. On one hand, digital solutions have enabled educational continuity for millions of displaced students and those in unsafe areas. On the other hand, this transformation has exacerbated existing inequalities and introduced new pedagogical concerns.

The reliance on digital modalities has fundamentally changed the nature of teaching and learning. Teachers have reported spending significant time mastering technologies like Zoom and Canva, often with minimal training. The pedagogical approach has shifted toward micro-learning, where core concepts are delivered in 10–15-minute bursts before anticipated disruptions.

This digital imperative has created what stakeholders describe as a "layered burden" on families. Access to quality education now depends on a family's financial capacity to purchase generators, Starlink systems, or EcoFlow units. The ability to participate in available educational modalities has become "a private expense" rather than a public right, creating access inequities that particularly affect lower-income households.

TRANSFORMING THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Perhaps the most profound impact of the crisis has been the transformation of educational roles and relationships. Due to ongoing conflict and digital disruption, teachers have evolved from "stable providers of knowledge" to "vital sources of psychological support" and

"emotional anchors" required to maintain engagement through screens. Their experience is now defined by "exhausting adaptation to rapid digitalization", combined with the constant threat of physical danger, highlighting the critical need for support systems that protect their wellbeing and sustain their ability to teach safely.

FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLING HAS TRANSFORMED FROM A STANDARD PATH TO ADULTHOOD INTO A "SURVIVAL MECHANISM" AND "CRITICAL SAFETY LINK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD."

Children have been forced to mature prematurely, with motivation driven more by "desperate need for live communication" than by academic advancement. This underscores the importance of psychosocial support alongside learning continuity to ensure children's safety and development.

Parents have similarly experienced role transformation, moving from passive supporters to "home teachers" tasked with explaining new material and serving as "primary monitors of attendance." This increased parental involvement has created new tensions within families, particularly with older students who feel a loss of independence and may prioritize immediate survival or income generation over academic goals. It also points to the need for guidance and support as parents take on expanded educational responsibilities.

These rapid shifts in educational roles reveal the urgent need for support measures that address both learning continuity and the psychosocial wellbeing of teachers, students, and families alike.

PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS: THE HIDDEN CRISIS

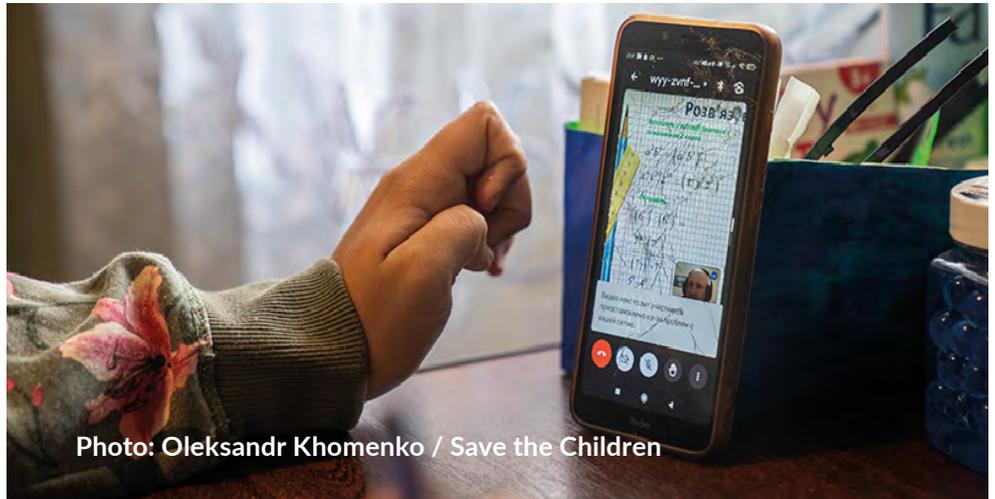


Photo: Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

CHRONIC STRESS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Respondents describe a pervasive state of "biological stress" significantly impairing children's ability to retain information and process complex concepts. The physiological state of stress has replaced the calm required for deep learning, creating what psychologists term a "toxic stress environment" that interferes with normal cognitive development.

This stress manifests in observable ways: reduced concentration, memory impairment, and rapid fatigue across all age groups. Physical exhaustion from sleep deprivation caused by nighttime alerts particularly affects morning alertness and learning capacity. In frontline regions, the nightly context of air raids directly impairs the brain's ability to engage in academic tasks the following day.

The long-term implications of this chronic stress environment are profound. Neuroscience research indicates that prolonged exposure to stress hormones can alter brain development, particularly in regions responsible for executive function, memory, and emotional regulation*. The Ukrainian education crisis thus represents not merely an interruption of learning but a potential alteration of cognitive development pathways for an entire generation.

SOCIAL MUSCLE ATROPHY

The isolation imposed by both pandemic and war has created what stakeholders describe as "social muscle atrophy" – a persistent inability to navigate interpersonal relationships. Children are increasingly socially anxious, withdrawn, or addicted to digital devices, with a systemic decline in empathy, constructive interaction, and verbal conflict resolution skills.

This social regression manifests in observable behaviors:

- Children hiding behind "black screens" during online classes
- Difficulty transitioning from virtual to real-world interactions
- Retreat into restricted groups of two or three
- Complete withdrawal from social engagement in some cases

Respondents note that children in the same vicinity often do not know one another, with socialization occurring almost exclusively during extracurricular activities. This loss of collective spirit has impaired speech development and basic communication skills, particularly among younger students who missed foundational social milestones during critical developmental periods.

AGE-SPECIFIC IMPACTS

The psychosocial impact varies significantly across age groups, creating distinct developmental challenges:

- Younger Children (Grades 1-3) exhibit notable emotional immaturity, having missed foundational early-childhood social milestones. Students who started school during the pandemic or war can find transition back to in-person socialization "painful and difficult." The lack of peer interaction during formative years has created gaps in social-emotional development that traditional pedagogical approaches struggle to address.
- Adolescents (Grades 7-10) demonstrate increased reliance on and over-adaptation to virtual environments. Social space has been replaced by group chats, leading to a loss of desire for live interaction. Real-world engagements now feel daunting or lead to frequent misunderstandings. Many retreat into restricted groups or "their own shells," finding virtual comfort in environments offering "total control" unlike the unpredictable real world.
- High School Students (Grades 10-11) represent a more complex profile. While still experiencing psychosocial challenges, many demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement driven by professional aspirations and the pressure of upcoming National Multi-Subject Tests (NMT). This group often exhibits a dual reality: advanced technological proficiency combined with compromised social development.

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY: THE ACADEMIC CRISIS

LEARNING LOSS TRAJECTORY

The decline in educational standards follows a distinct trajectory divided into four phases:

2014-2019 Period of interrupted progress with resilience building

2020-2021 Pandemic-induced disruption and digital acceleration

2022-2023 Full-scale war and systemic adaptation

2024-2025 Cumulative degradation and normalization of crisis

Stakeholders report that while students formally "keep pace with the curriculum," their real proficiency is "superficial." The educational system has been compressed and simplified, with secondary materials sacrificed to ensure coverage of foundational subjects during brief windows of connectivity.

At the same time, some progress has been made in reaching students through online or mixed learning modalities: approximately 1.5 million students were engaged a year ago, and now around 800,000 continue in online or blended formats*. While this indicates partial continuity, it does not offset the overall decline in educational quality or the cumulative learning loss experienced by the majority of students.

* https://lookerstudio.google.com/reporting/6c10cd85-b49c-4586-b6a0-d91e28656ff0/page/p_vc9vh9xzjd

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC IMPACTS

The crisis has not affected all subjects equally, creating a hierarchy of learning loss:

- Linear subjects – particularly Mathematics, Physics, and Foreign Languages – have suffered most severely. These subjects require guided practice and practical experimentation, neither of which is feasible in current remote or shelter-based formats. The gap in exact sciences has reached a critical point where students lack fundamental logic required to understand and progress. As one educator noted, "missing one foundational building block created a 'snowball effect' of knowledge gaps" that prevents comprehension of subsequent topics.
- Humanities' subjects prove more adaptable to current conditions. Stakeholders suggest these subjects can be caught up through independent reading and self-directed learning. However, even here, the quality of engagement differs significantly from pre-crisis standards, with depth of analysis and critical thinking compromised.

THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE

Perhaps the most striking disparity in learning loss exists between rural and urban students. The collected data reveal a severe expansion of learning gaps, with rural students estimated to be lagging three to four years behind their urban peers. This divide reflects multiple factors:

- Infrastructure disparities: Rural areas often lack reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and physical shelter capacity
- Resource inequity: Urban centers attract more humanitarian aid and technical support
- Teacher availability: Rural schools face greater challenges in retaining qualified teachers
- Transportation barriers: Displacement and insecurity limit mobility for rural students

This rural-urban divide represents not merely an academic disparity but a fundamental equity issue that threatens to create a two-tiered educational system within Ukraine.



Photo: Oleksandr Khomenko / Save the Children

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS: COMPOUND DISADVANTAGES

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

IDP children face unique and compounded educational challenges. Capacity strains in host communities have led to "parallel schooling" systems, where displaced students often remain enrolled in their original schools online to preserve social stability and avoid overcrowding in host community schools.

Where physical integration occurs, the influx of IDPs has led to oversaturated classrooms, with class sizes swelling from 10 to 40 students. Host schools frequently lack the physical shelter capacity, pedagogical expertise, or resources to manage these diverse learning levels and displacement-related trauma. Additionally, children in safer regions often experience bullying and hostility from local peers, a concern consistently reported by the children themselves.

The psychosocial impact of displacement creates additional barriers. Children often experience a state of "suspended animation," refusing to integrate into host communities because they hope to return home soon. This temporary mindset, combined with social tensions, further undermines educational engagement and social development.

DOUBLE DISPLACEMENT: THE MOST VULNERABLE

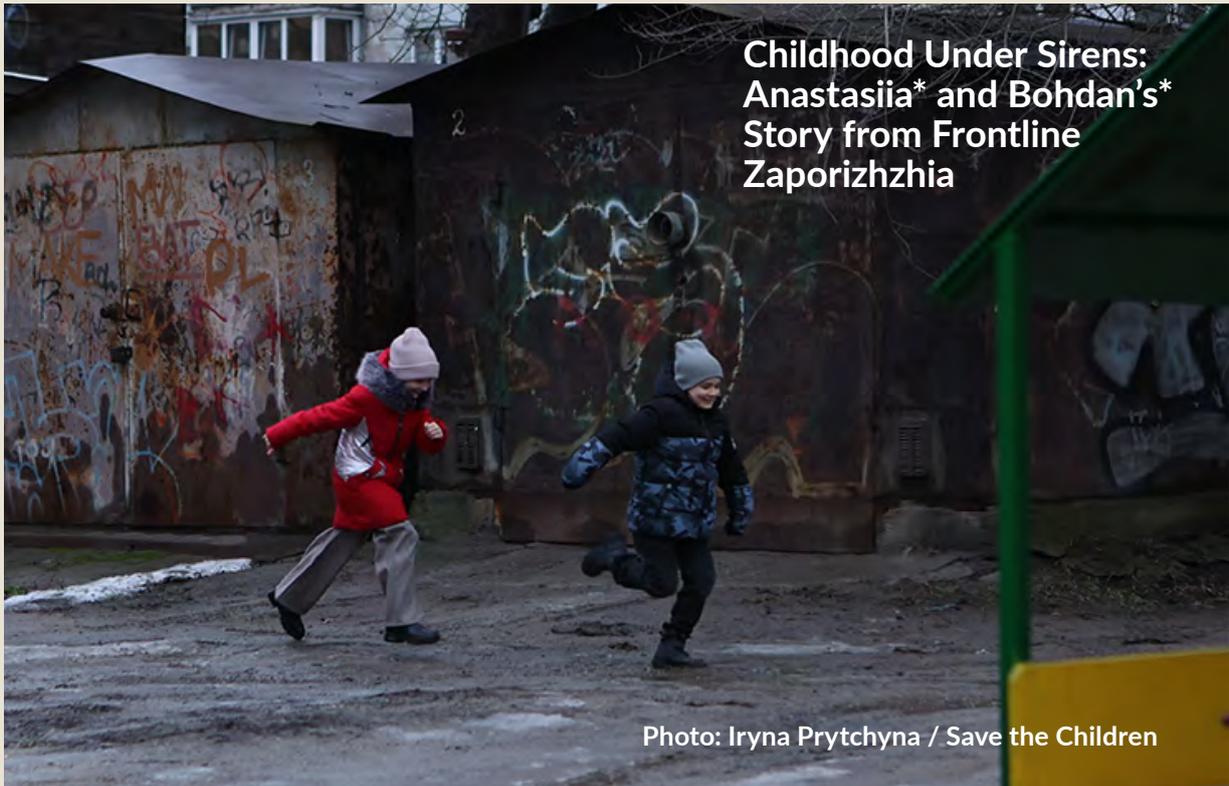
A particularly vulnerable group emerges from those experiencing "double displacement" – children who fled in 2014 and were forced to flee again in 2022, sometimes enduring multiple or protracted displacements. For these students, the concept of a stable home and school no longer exists.

This group exhibits the highest levels of educational disengagement and psychosocial distress. The cumulative effect of multiple displacements has created what psychologists term an "attachment disruption" that undermines both educational motivation and social integration. Without targeted support and specialized psychosocial interventions, these students face the highest risk of long-term educational failure.

RETURNEES: INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

The reintegration of returnees reveals significant gaps in formal accreditation, certification, and standard alignment between Ukrainian and foreign educational systems. Children returning from abroad face specific complications regarding curriculum alignment, particularly the transition from lighter workloads and disparate subject sequences of European schools to the high-intensity Ukrainian curriculum.

Social dynamics present further barriers. Children returning to de-occupied territories sometimes face antagonistic environments where they are viewed with suspicion by those who remained.



**Childhood Under Sirens:
Anastasiia* and Bohdan's*
Story from Frontline
Zaporizhzhia**

Photo: Iryna Prytchyna / Save the Children

When the full-scale war began, siblings Anastasiia, 8*, and Bohdan, 9* with their parents were forced to leave their small hometown in Zaporizhzhia region. Today, their hometown is occupied, and the family's apartment there has been completely destroyed.

Now they live in Zaporizhzhia. The city remains under constant threat: air raid sirens sound frequently, often several times a day or even more than a day long, and nights are regularly interrupted by explosions from drones and missile attacks. Over the past weeks, alarms have become almost continuous, leaving families in a state of constant tension.

Like many children in frontline cities, Anastasiia* has learned to live with fear, day by day adapting to the war reality. Her brother Bohdan* can already distinguish by sound whether a drone, a missile, or a guided bomb is flying overhead.

School is another part of Anastasiia*'s and Bohdan`s* daily lives shaped by the war. They study offline in an underground school, where deep shelters protect children from shelling. Her mother says that while studying

underground is far from normal, it gives her children something essential: a sense of safety and real human contact. In the shelter, they do not hear explosions. They sit at a desk, see their teachers in front of them, talk to classmates, and feel like it's a regular school day again. This makes the level of knowledge better, and children improve their socializing skills, like how to make advice or why it is important to share your stationery with others.

While the emotional tension exists. Continuous air raid sirens, nights without proper sleep, and constant alertness exhaust children's nervous systems. Veronika* explains that children feel fear even more deeply than adults, and parents try to hide their anxiety so as not to pass it on.

A place of relief and stability for Anastasiia* and her brother Bohdan* is the Child Friendly Space, run by Charity Fund "Posmishka UA" together with Save the Children, with the support of Swiss Solidarity. They have been attending the Space for several years, since the time when schools were fully online.

THE AI DILEMMA: TECHNOLOGY AS BOTH SOLUTION AND PROBLEM

PERVASIVE AI DEPENDENCE

A rapidly emerging theme in 2025 is the dispersal of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools among Ukrainian students. Educators report AI usage at "overwhelming 95%" levels in some regions, with students increasingly using AI to complete assignments, "write" essays, and solve problems instantly.

This dependence has created what stakeholders term an "illusion of knowledge" where grades remain stable, but actual understanding and critical thinking skills atrophy. Teachers report receiving homework that is grammatically perfect but lacks the students' authentic voice. Some indicators of AI-generated work include the frequent inclusion of chatbot service phrases such as "Do you want more ideas?" in submitted work. This trend could disproportionately affect students already facing educational disruption, compounding existing inequities in learning outcomes.

AI AS A COPING MECHANISM

Despite concerns about academic integrity, many stakeholders do not attribute this dependence to "mere laziness." Rather, experts view AI as a potential tool for resilience, and both teachers and caregivers consider it "a rational response to an impossible environment" and "a coping mechanism to bypass an unmanageable workload."

In an environment of constant air raids, power outages, and pervasive stress, students use AI to "buy time" to sleep, rest, or simply cope with overwhelming volumes of independent work. As one EdTech expert noted, "AI is a survival mechanism. The system pretends there is no war and demands the full curriculum. Children use AI to save time so they can attend clubs, or sometimes even just manage to sleep and eat."

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

The shift to AI dependence has compromised the integrity of academic assessments, with students using AI often receiving higher marks than peers performing tasks manually. This has fostered a "cheating culture" that undermines general student motivation and the fairness of the educational system.

The impact varies by educational format:

- Online students – utilize AI more frequently due to continuous digital environment
- Physical/hybrid students – use AI less due to supervised environments

However, this gap is gradually disappearing as "AI becomes more and more integrated into daily life".

REGULATORY VACUUM

The educational sector lacks a unified strategy to regulate or integrate AI technology. Schools approach the issue inconsistently – some integrate AI tasks into IT curricula with parental control, while others leave oversight entirely to families.

Teachers admit they are playing catch-up with students' digital skills and lack training to distinguish between AI-assisted learning and AI-generated cheating. Without proper digital literacy training, AI remains more harmful than helpful. However, stakeholders acknowledge that with structured guidance – teaching students to formulate prompts, critically analyze answers, and verify information – if students are taught to formulate prompts, analyze answers, and verify information, AI could transition from a substitute for thinking to an effective auxiliary tool.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS: A PATCHWORK OF CRISES

FRONTLINE REGIONS: MAXIMUM DISRUPTION

Frontline oblasts like Sumy and Kharkiv reported the highest national learning losses due to persistent air raids lasting up to eight hours, which effectively terminate instructional days. The reliance on asynchronous learning via mobile apps (teachers simply sending tasks to be completed later) has taken a heavy toll on academic quality.

In these regions, education functions more as a psychological shelter than academic pursuit. Students in rural frontline areas are estimated to lag two to four years behind their urban peers in safer regions, creating a fragmented national standard of education.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTRAINTS AND ADAPTATIONS

Geological factors create unique challenges in different regions:

- Mykolaiv region: Geological barriers prevent construction of basement shelters, forcing reliance on mobile messaging apps for instruction
- Sumy region: Better shelter infrastructure allows for more organized and consistent learning experiences
- Western regions: Maintained better access and infrastructure, leading to widening quality gaps

These regional variations have created what stakeholders describe as a "geography of educational opportunity," where location determines both safety and learning quality.

SHELTER-BASED LEARNING MODELS

Different regions have developed distinct approaches to shelter-based education:

- Snihurivska hromada (Mykolaivska): Protocols dictate immediate stop to lessons during sirens, with Viber alerts using visual cues to signal resumption of synchronous classes. Students temporarily shift to online or virtual groups during alerts. The transformation of physical schools into larger, unfamiliar online groups creates social inhibition, worsened by hiding behind screens with turned-off cameras.
- Nedryhaylivska hromada (Sumska): Fully equipped shelters allow lessons to resume within three minutes of a siren. Schools serve as hubs to broadcast to remote students, with shelters zoned for different classes. Educators prioritize core subjects, switching to arts for emotional decompression when students appear exhausted.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational crisis in Ukraine represents not merely an interruption of learning but a fundamental threat to both human development and national recovery. The evidence presented here demonstrates that the cumulative impact of over a decade of crisis has created educational conditions that cannot be resolved through temporary measures or incremental adjustments alone.

What is required is a comprehensive, long-term approach that recognizes education as both a humanitarian imperative and a strategic investment in Ukraine's future. The recommendations outlined here provide a framework for such an approach, addressing immediate operational needs while building foundations for sustainable recovery.

The time for action is now. Every day of delay prolongs the educational crisis and deepens its long-term consequences. The children in Ukraine deserve not merely to survive but to thrive, to develop the knowledge, skills, and resilience needed to rebuild their society and contribute to a peaceful future.

As one stakeholder powerfully stated, "We can catch up on knowledge. We can rebuild schools. But no one can ever return their childhood to them." This truth underscores the moral imperative of our response – not merely to restore educational systems but to restore hope, opportunity, and dignity to a generation of Ukrainian children whose education has been sacrificed to conflict.

The path forward requires commitment, resources, and innovative thinking. It requires recognizing that education in Ukraine is not merely a technical challenge but a test of our shared humanity and our collective commitment to building a better future, even in the face of extraordinary adversity.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE

UPGRADE SHELTER FUNCTIONALITY:

Infrastructure must evolve beyond basic physical safety to create functional learning environments. Shelters require adequate ventilation, modern sanitation, and ergonomically appropriate furniture to ensure student comfort during prolonged alerts. In areas where school buildings are destroyed, modular or temporary schools should be constructed to restore physical access.

ENSURE POWER AUTONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY:

Schools need autonomous power solutions to maintain instructional continuity during prolonged air raids. Automated alternative power systems (high-capacity battery systems or generators) should replace manual units to ensure rapid transitions during outages. Reliable, high-speed internet access is critical for maintaining connectivity for hybrid and remote modalities.

ADDRESS TECHNICAL EQUITY:

Smartphones are inadequate for navigating complex educational platforms. Donors and authorities should prioritize the provision of laptops to replace smartphones, ensuring students have necessary hardware for full digital participation. Individual power banks should be available to students to maintain connectivity during home blackouts.

TEACHER SUPPORT AND WORKFORCE WELLBEING

MITIGATE WORKFORCE BURNOUT:

The teaching workforce represents the critical foundation of the education system. Investments should include salary increases, creative sabbaticals, and targeted mental health programs. Without well-supported teachers, even material resources will remain underutilized.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT:

Teachers need continued professional development in AI and digital literacy to manage high-tech environments. Support for project-based learning and professional orientation can help rebuild internal motivation and engagement.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

PRIORITISE PSYCHOSOCIAL STABILISATION:

Engagement hinges on restoring safety and normalcy. Psychological services must be integrated into all educational activities, with an emphasis on emotional relief and routine wellbeing check-ins over rigid academic results.

ADDRESS SPECIALIST SHORTAGES:

Expansion of psychological specialist pools is critical to address war trauma, cyberbullying, and severe social withdrawal. Programs should also include training for teachers to recognize and respond to mental health concerns.

HOLISTIC FAMILY SUPPORT:

Student outcomes are inextricably linked to parental wellbeing. Support mechanisms must target the family unit holistically, including psycho-emotional training for caregivers. Special attention should be given to students who are orphaned or have missing parents.

CURRICULUM AND LEARNING RECOVERY

MODERNISE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS:

Current textbooks are outdated and ill-suited for wartime and digital education. Incorporate New Ukrainian Schools (NUS) materials alongside interactive, gamified, and flexible digital resources that support students facing intermittent attendance due to displacement, alerts, or other disruptions.

RATIONALISE THE CURRICULUM:

The current educational process suffers from over-saturation, with students and teachers burdened by non-essential tasks that contribute little to learning outcomes. Curriculum reform should focus on prioritizing core competencies, real-life applications, and critical foundational skills, while reducing excessive academic formalities. This aligns with ongoing national reforms and helps maintain engagement under high-stress conditions.

TARGETED LEARNING RECOVERY:

- **Primary (Grades 1-4):** Deliver targeted support to ensure acquisition of essential foundational literacy and numeracy skills, along with psychosocial and social-emotional interventions.
- **Basic Secondary (Grades 5-9):** Implement subject-specific catch-up and remedial support, integrated with psychosocial support and social-emotional skills development.
- **Upper Secondary (Grades 10-12):** Provide subject-specific catch-up and remedial support, combined vocational guidance, career exploration, and targeted exam preparation, as well as psychosocial support services.
- **Leadership Programs:** Foster purpose and civic engagement through project-based learning and community initiatives.

POLICY AND SYSTEMIC REFORM

ESTABLISH NATIONAL AI FRAMEWORK:

Develop comprehensive, unified guidelines for AI integration in education, balancing innovation with academic integrity. Training programs should focus on digital literacy, critical thinking and responsible AI use, rather than outright prohibition. Frameworks should also include monitoring and support for teachers to manage AI-assisted learning effectively.

CREATE REGIONAL EQUITY MECHANISMS:

Address the safety and access divide through targeted, context-specific interventions that account for regional variations in conflict intensity, school infrastructure and student displacement. Mechanisms should ensure equitable access to learning resources, technology, and psychosocial support across all regions.

DEVELOP LONG-TERM RECOVERY STRATEGY:

Recognize that education recovery requires addressing both immediate operational needs and long-term psychosocial impacts. The strategy should include provisions for children experiencing multiple displacements, those with special educational needs, and students affected by severe trauma or prolonged disruption.

PROTECTION, LEGAL OBLIGATIONS, AND INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The protection of education in Ukraine remains both a humanitarian priority and a legal obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law. Continued attacks on civilian infrastructure, displacement, and insecurity have severely undermined children's access to safe and quality education. Safeguarding education requires sustained commitment from all duty bearers and international partners.

ALL PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT SHOULD:

- Respect international humanitarian law by refraining from attacks on schools, kindergartens, and other civilian infrastructure.
- Avoid the military use of education facilities and take feasible precautions to minimize harm to children and educators.
- Ensure that children in areas affected by hostilities or occupation can access education safely, without discrimination, coercion, or violence.

THE GOVERNMENT OF UKRAINE SHOULD:

- Strengthen implementation of commitments related to the protection of education from attack and school safety standards.
- Prioritize equitable access to safe learning spaces, digital learning tools, and adequate shelter infrastructure, particularly in heavily affected regions.
- Expand availability of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services for children, teachers, and families.
- Support inclusive access to education for displaced children and those with disabilities.

DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS SHOULD:

- Sustain multi-year, flexible funding for education in emergencies, including rehabilitation of damaged schools and safe learning spaces.
- Support structured education and MHPSS programming in high-risk and conflict-affected areas.
- Strengthen the technical capacity of national and local authorities, as well as Ukrainian civil society organizations, to deliver inclusive and quality education services.





ANALYTICAL NOTE

DIGNITY, SAFETY AND TRUST: WHAT CHILDREN EXPECT FROM EDUCATION DURING THE WAR

In 2025, Ukraine Education Cluster established an official Children Strategic Advisory Group as a permanent advisory body involved in decision-making on priority humanitarian response in the education sector. The group includes boys and girls from among the war-affected population of different regions of Ukraine aged 14-18.

This analytical note consolidates the deliverables of the Children Strategic Advisory Group for July 2025 and is intended as a recommendation for a wider audience of partner organizations (humanitarian, developmental, private), education authorities, schools, student self-government bodies, and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

The text of the document and all recommendations are prepared entirely by children based on the need assessments they conducted with the support of partner organizations in 2024-2025.

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THE ANALYTICAL NOTE



ANNEX I: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DATA LIMITATIONS

METHODOLOGY

The assessment employed a strictly qualitative methodology to capture narrative-driven data reflecting the lived experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders. Given the rapid implementation timeline, the assessment focused on two selected oblasts and relied on input from teachers, caregivers, and purposively selected education sector stakeholders able to provide strategic insight into systemic challenges and gaps.

Primary data collection was conducted in Mykolaiv and Sumy oblasts. These locations were selected to provide a representative perspective on regions heavily affected by frontline proximity, displacement flows, and infrastructure damage, while maintaining a substantial population of

students engaged in offline learning. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of challenges in frontline contexts, experts operating at national and regional levels, as well as in other frontline areas, were also consulted.

The assessment utilised 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – 8 with caregivers and 3 with educational personnel – and 13 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Department of Education representatives, child psychologists, NGO representatives, and sector specialists (EdTech, Artificial Intelligence, and Education). The sample size was designed to achieve thematic saturation while enabling rapid deployment and analysis.

DATA LIMITATIONS

This rapid qualitative assessment faces several methodological challenges that should be considered when interpreting findings:

Time Constraints and Security Context

The data collection window was strictly limited to one week (December 15–21), requiring rapid scheduling of 24 qualitative data collection exercises. The compressed timeline, further impacted by frequent electricity outages and active shelling, did not allow for flexible rescheduling, imposing significant burdens on both participants and the research team.

Sampling and Accessibility Challenges

Initial non-response contacts required adaptive sampling, and reliance on external focal points

for participant recruitment resulted in minor sampling variances. Some participants fell outside of primary sampling criteria due to limited time for pre-screening processes.

Observer Effects

The presence of Save the Children Protection Unit representatives in focus groups may have introduced observer bias, with some sessions shifting from objective discussion to expressing gratitude or requesting continued aid.

Despite these limitations, the qualitative methodology provides valuable insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of stakeholders, capturing nuances that quantitative approaches might miss.



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